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THE WAGES OF SIN

A NOVEL

BY

LUCAS MALET

Author of 'Col. Enderby's Wife,' 'A Counsel of Perfection,' etc.

Mary St Leger Kingsley Harrison

'Did we think victory great?
'So it is.—But now it seems to me, when it cannot be helped, that defeat is great,
'And that death and dismay are great.'

VOLUME I

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THE WAGES OF SIN.

BOOK I.—MAN AND MAID.

'Things are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why then should we desire to be deceived.'—BISHOP BUTLER.

CHAPTER I.

ONE September day towards sunset, when the world was younger by some fourteen or fifteen years than it is now, a small family party was gathered together in the long, narrow strip of turf and flower-garden known as the bowling-green, that lies under the old wing of Slerracombe House.

The individuals composing this party were not, with one exception, very remarkable at first sight. A lady of about five-and-forty, seated in a low wicker chair, near a tea table placed on the gravel just outside the open doors of the conservatory. She was large, sleek, rather heavy-featured. Arrayed in wig and robes, she would have made an impressive judge. Her presence would have added dignity, as well as material weight, to the bench. She was not, however, arrayed in official robes, but merely in mourning—mourning, it may be added, of the order which, among sober-minded persons of the upper classes, denotes

widowhood in the passive and permanent rather than the active stage. At the table, two little girls—in brown holland frocks and straw hats of the kind known to contemporary fashion as 'limpet-shaped,' and fondly believed to compensate by successful preservation of the complexion of the wearer, for the immediate disadvantage of extreme unbecomingness—were sitting silent, absorbed in the assimilation of liberal supplies of cake and grapes, and bread and jam. Further, a handsome, black-headed boy, also consuming cake, but taking his meal in an ambulatory and episodic manner, in the intervals of driving away a tame doe, with a bell round her neck, whose feminine inquisitiveness prompted her to ill-judged inquiries regarding the contents of teacups and sugar basins. Finally, a clergyman, Kent Crookenden by name, Rector of Brattleworthy with Slerracombe, a bachelor of about fifty, brother-in-law of the lady in the wicker chair, and guardian of her only son, Lancelot—the boy already mentioned.

The Rector had refused to have any tea. He leaned back in another wicker chair, his legs crossed, his coat thrown open, and his thumbs stuck in the armholes of his waistcoat, surveying the scene before him with an expression of half-contemptuous though not unkindly amusement. Sometimes his eyes wandered from the group in the foreground to a wide stretch of open park, dotted with fallow deer, lying north and west below the terraced garden. The park dipped to the left towards a wooded stream in

the hollow, and swept up again into breezy hillside, red and yellow with withering bracken. Beyond it the sea, crossed by wandering tide-lines of the palest azure, spread away calm and oily, under a sky of filmy white cloud, to the high faint line of the horizon.

The view was extremely pleasing in its dreamy quiet, specially to one with a taste for the characteristic features of West Country scenery. And Kent Crookenden was sincerely attached to the West Country. All the same he was not of the temper of mind that finds its highest and most constant satisfaction in the contemplation of the outward aspects of nature. Hill, wood, stream, moorland, sea, values of light and shade, splendours of colour are, no doubt, immensely elevating objects of attention in their way; but they do not, as a rule, minister largely or directly to the spectator's sense of humour. And Kent Crookenden's sense of humour was almost undesirably keen and persistent. To this, his face—it had no hair on it—bore ample testimony. A square forehead. Bright, steady eyes, set rather far apart. A hooked nose, with a noticeable downward inclination of the tip, the nostrils deep cut and open. A mouth thin-lipped and under hung; the corners of it also with a downward inclination, and with queer twitchings and puckerings about them suggestive of thoughts a trifle too merry or too caustic for ordinary conversation.

After some years of travels both in the East and the

United States, at about thirty, Kent Crookenden had suddenly decided to enter the Church. In one respect the decision was, certainly, a wise one. For a strong sense of humour necessarily demands a good supply of raw material, in the form of human nature, upon which to exercise itself; and whatever the more serious privileges of the clerical profession may be, there is no question but that it offers to any man, with the wit to use them, singular facilities for intimate and varied study of the ways and habits, the weaknesses, the appetites, the endless touching little stupidities in thought and conduct of that most inimitable invention, the human animal.

In due time his elder brother, Zachary Crookenden, had presented him to the living of Brattleworthy with Slerracombe. For that gentleman had bought the advowson of the living when, his fortune having reached very considerable proportions, he married Miss Caroline Hellard—niece of the late and cousin of the present Lord Combmartin—retired from active participation in the affairs of the well-known firm of Crookenden, Manserge and Co., merchants, shipping agents, and bankers, of Bristol and New York; and, having purchased Slerracombe House and some three or four thousand acres of land adjoining, settled himself down to live the leisurely life of an English country gentleman.

Kent Crookenden had ceased to entertain any dreams of ecstatic personal bliss by the time he took up his resi-

dence in the ugly, white-washed rectory house at Brattleworthy. And he was consequently very well satisfied with his surroundings. He amused himself greatly by observing the manners and customs of his merchant brother turned squire, of the local gentry, of his fellow-clergy, and of his parishioners. And being a member of the Anthropological Society, and a fair ethnologist and archæologist, he brought a considerable amount of theoretical knowledge to bear upon the facts immediately presented to his notice. He had, indeed, *à propos* of certain quaint wedding customs obtaining in the neighbouring fishing village of Beera Mills, written a monograph on Primitive Marriage, which —whatever its scientific value—certainly afforded very gay reading to persons whose mental digestion was not fatally weakened by over refinement.

Upon the still September afternoon in question, the human creature who had the honour of occupying a foremost place in the Rector's attention, was the, as yet, unspecified member of the family party, viz., a slender slip of a girl, whose light movements and rather startling costume rendered her small presence of marked value in the otherwise low-toned picture.

She wore a straight, sacque-shaped frock of orange and scarlet checked cotton, and a broad scarlet sash knotted loosely about her waist. The frock was undeniably short, and revealed the embroidered edge of a white petticoat and a length of open-worked, black silk stocking. Her

hat bore no relation to the estimable limpet. It was white, high-crowned, and adorned on one side with a flaring bow of scarlet ribbon. Yet the little lady's complexion did not appear to have suffered to the extent to which, according to all nursery canons of poetical justice, it ought to have suffered from this reprehensible levity of headgear. Her small face was very pale.

Indeed, there were curiously contradictory elements in the little girl's appearance. At a short distance the effect of her vivid figure was like that of some coquettish personage on the lid of a Parisian *bonbonière*. Yet the child's face was not only pale, but full of reserve, of a questioning wistfulness, lighted by a pair of big, wondering, dark-blue eyes. And it was precisely this contradiction, this duality of suggestion, that her uncle, Kent Crookenden, found so interesting as he sat watching her. Mary was twelve years old. Usually an awkward age, as the Rector reflected. It was difficult to say as yet—for she was like a half-fledged bird, all eyes and neck and legs—whether she would grow up commonplace-looking, or develop into an unusually beautiful woman, like——

Mr. Crookenden did not finish the sentence even in thought. He agreed with himself to change the subject immediately. It was a subject, in fact, which for many years he had found a very frequent necessity for changing. But, though his efforts would at first appear successful, he observed that his mental conversation had a tiresome

habit of working back into the same groove again before many days, or indeed hours, were over.

On the present occasion he routed the unprofitable subject completely, as he fondly imagined, by turning and addressing his sister-in-law.

'By the way, Caroline,' he remarked, 'if Coad says anything to you about a party of young people from Beera picnicing down at Red Rock, remember I gave them leave to go there. They asked permission very civilly, and I saw no objection to granting it.'

'Yes, I suppose it wouldn't do to refuse people now. If you have finished your tea, Adela, you and Carrie may go'—this over her ample shoulder to the silent little girls in brown holland. 'Of course I never pretended to care about the park being thrown open; but poor Mr. Crookenden made a point of it.'

'Quite right too,' said the Rector.

'And I suppose these people are not likely to do any serious damage.'

'Damage? What possible damage can they or any one else do to a mile of rabbit warren, two or three acres of perpendicular slate and granite, and the Atlantic?'

'Oh, well,' Mrs. Crookenden rejoined, in her calm, well-bred way, 'they leave bottles about, and paper-bags, which is not at all nice. And then the children are very fond of taking their tea down to Red Rock, and I am always rather afraid of infection. With people out of

those stuffy little cottages at Beera, one never can be quite sure, you know. Have you said your grace, Carrie ?'

This again over her shoulder, with a slow smile at the two girls as they left the table. Then she settled herself back in her chair and applied her fingers to the further development of a nebulous garment in crochet.

The Rector made no reply to his sister-in-law's observations, but his mouth twitched slightly and turned down at one corner.

He held that there was a very healthy reserve force of egotism in Mrs. Crookenden. Her egotism was not of the baser sort, he admitted. It was a comprehensive, tribal kind of egotism, including several persons besides herself. Whether it had ever entirely included her late husband, his brother Zachary, the Rector had never yet been able to determine. Still, in the main, he liked his sister-in-law. She was a distinguished-looking woman; and, save when you trod on the toes of some small prejudice, a very fairly agreeable one. She was also very fairly amenable to reason, which, considering the relation in which he stood both to her son and the Slerracombe property, was a matter of sincere thanksgiving to the Rector. Moreover, she kept a first-rate cook. I regret to admit this item carried considerable weight in Kent Crookenden's mind.

In the world at large Mrs. Crookenden had the reputa-

tion of being a very admirable person. She was of a placid disposition. The whole business of her courtship and marriage had been pre-eminently distinguished for its placidity. As the younger daughter of a younger son —by no means oppressed with a superfluity of worldly goods—she, being a right-minded young lady, had immediately realised the desirability of an alliance with the rich, middle-aged merchant-banker. She accepted him calmly, and without hesitation, when he proposed to her. He had been married before. But his first wife—I speak from the point of view of the poor lady's successor—had had the good taste to die childless. The second Mrs. Crookenden proceeded to fulfil all her marital obligations, the production of a son and heir included, with well-bred composure. And when Mr. Crookenden, after a few years' residence at Slerracombe—finding, somehow, the leisurely life of a country gentleman far harder work than that of the Bristol counting-house—left this world, in which he had laid up such a handsome amount of material treasure, for that other, in which all such treasure is reported to be inconveniently devoid of market value, his wife manifested no objection to surviving him.

In fact, she survived him with what appeared to some persons—among them William Crookenden, now head of the firm, and father of little Mary—an uncalled-for amount of her habitual placidity. The Dowager Lady Combmartin and the Hellard side of the connection, however, took

a different view of her conduct. And, being who they were, surely their view must have been the correct one? They declared that—'dearest Carrie, as usual, was behaving quite beautifully. And they did hope, poor darling, after all she had gone through, that she would be rewarded.' It was by way of contributing to this end, I suppose, that they all elected to come down in little batches of twos and threes and stay at Slerracombe shortly after the funeral. The Hellards are a numerous clan as everybody knows. They hold together. They have a great power of standing back to back. Their Irish estate pays very badly. They are not rich, but they are acquisitive. They make excellent use of their opportunities. A great many of them were a great deal at Slerracombe during that spring and summer; and the weather, I remember, was particularly lovely.

Kent Crookenden derived much edification from the observation of these things. Old Lady Combmartin was most gracious to him, pronouncing him very superior to the rest of his family. Lady Dorothy Hellard, a sprightly spinster whose age it would be uncourteous to state in plain figures, also looked kindly upon him. Said, more than once, how thankful she should be if she could only manage to be more with dearest Carrie in future. Often spoke of her longing for a quiet country life. And remarked casually one day that, with a little building, the Rectory would not really be such a very bad house.

The Rector, however, did not see it; which means that he saw quite clearly enough to see through it, and the notion of running in couples with Lady Dorothy failed to attract him. Possibly the unprofitable subject which he so constantly tried and, alas! failed to expunge from his thoughts had something to do with this disinclination. For a man may be a good ethnologist and member of any number of learned societies, and yet have a weak unscientific side to him, where sentiment obtains to the lamentable discomfiture of common-sense and pure reason.

But Mrs. Crookenden, being ignorant of the existence of the unprofitable subject, and having had many confidential conversations with old Lady Combmartin, still entertained a hope that the Rector might not remain everlastingly obdurate. Now, as she sat in large, judicial silence developing her woollen crochet garment, her mind was busy, as it had so often been busy before, with devices for bringing round the conversation to marriage in general, and the Lady Dorothy's marriage in particular. Unfortunately, the Rector was somewhat unapproachable when it came to personal matters. And how to offer her cousin to him as permanent lady companion, delicately, diplomatically, yet clearly and unmistakably, Mrs. Crookenden really did not quite see.

Meanwhile Mary, who had been flitting about at the further end of the long strip of turf, suddenly bore down upon her uncle. The girl and the tame doe arrived to-

gether with a rush which caused Mrs. Crookenden to look up from her crochet with an air of cool, remonstrant wonder. She possessed the convenient gift of expressing annoyance and displeasure without resorting to the coarse and more or less compromising medium of speech.

'Please, Uncle Kent, may I go down into the park with Lance?' the girl asked. 'You needn't go home just yet, need you? Lance has been to look at the hall clock. He says it's ever so early.'

Kent Crookenden, though not greatly addicted to caresses, put his arm round the slim, brilliant, little figure, and drew it close to him.

'What do you want to go down into the park again for, Miss Polly?' he asked.

'Why, to draw the deer. They're standing nice and quiet now. And Lance says we can get quite near them.'

It was observable that Mary's voice was singularly low and grave in quality, for a girl of her age.

Kent Crookenden smiled at her, at once tenderly and mockingly, and gently pinched her ear.

'Draw, draw, draw, from morning to night; why, this devotion to the fine arts is astounding, Miss Polly. Do you know, Caroline,' he went on, turning to his sister-in-law, 'this young lady promises to introduce a quite new element into the family history.'

'I think she has introduced it already,' Mrs. Crookenden remarked.

'Yes, perhaps she has,' the Rector said, drily. 'New elements are wholesome. But I was referring specially to the artistic element, which has not, so far, been cultivated very successfully among us Crookendens. For we can hardly call poor, dear Sara Jacobini, with that impecunious, operatic Hebrew husband of hers, a success, I suppose. By the way, have you happened to hear anything of the poor woman lately, Caroline?'

'Nothing at all,' replied Mrs. Crookenden, a positive richness of negative in her tone.

'Oh! I beg your pardon. I forgot second cousins don't count on my side of the family. All the same, I own I have a weakness for Sara Jacobini. She has stuck by her operatic Hebrew very gallantly, through good report and evil report. I must remember to write to her again. I ought to have written sooner. Well, and so you want to go and draw the deer, Polly; and I want to go home to my books and my dinner. Whose wants are the most imperative, do you think, yours or mine?'

The little girl nestled up against him prettily, coaxingly.—'Mine, I guess,' she said.

Mrs. Crookenden moved slightly, causing her silk dress to rustle and her wicker chair to creak.

'Very well then, I suppose I must endure the pangs of intellectual and physical hunger and give you half-an-hour longer, young lady. But where is the famous draw-

ing book? Let me look at the labours of the day as far as they have gone yet.'

'I 'low——' began Mary, brightly.

Mrs. Crookenden glanced up from her crochet again, with that same air of cool remonstrant wonder, as though the speaker came perilously near being guilty of contempt of court.

'I 'low I'd just as soon you didn't see it, Uncle Kent. You never know what my drawings are meant for; anyway, you make believe you don't. Lance always knows, now.'

'Oh! Lancelot always knows, does he? Lancelot is a monstrously clever fellow,' said the Rector, pinching her ear again.

The boy was standing in front of his uncle, while the tame doe poked her square pinkish-brown muzzle under his arm in the vain effort to get at the leaves on the twig of lime he held just beyond her reach. The doe was strong. She pushed and pressed with her hard muscular shoulders. But the boy was stronger still. He stood his ground. He was not thinking about the doe and her desire for lime leaves, but about his little cousin, and her desire to go down with him into the park again. Lancelot entertained much respectful admiration for his little cousin. He liked to be with her, though she did snub him a good deal at times. Polly was a new experience. He had never seen anybody like her. So he

took the snubbing as part of the general novelty and bore it very good-temperedly.

He was a fine-looking lad, with the square-made figure, short, straight nose, well-shaped mouth—the lips full, yet firm and sweet—crisp hair sitting close to the head, smooth, oval, unshadowed face, and air of serene content which often go with remarkable bodily strength. His check tweed jacket was adorned by a multiplicity of pockets, and had a flap of brown leather let in on either shoulder. He wore very knowing breeches and gaiters. Lancelot hated new clothes. These were sufficiently worn to afford him that most perfect form of satisfaction which consists in indifference. To know they are so all right that you need not think about them is the acme of happiness in respect of clothes. Across his back he carried a pretty little rifle, slung by a strap.

Kent Crookenden looked from the pale-faced girl leaning against him to this very sportsmanlike young gentleman, and back again. His heavy under-jaw protruded, and his mouth worked into a twitching, caustic smile. Yet his eyes remained wholly kindly.

'Lancelot seems to be making all the running just now, eh, Polly?'

'He's going back to school the day after to-morrow,' she put in, apologetically.

The Rector's smile broadened.

'Oh! I'm not jealous, you conceited little puss. There,

go along and draw the deer, or anything else you like in heaven or earth. Take care of her, Lancelot.'

'All right,' the boy said. He stuffed the lime leaves, twig and all, in between the doe's nibbling lips. 'Come along, Polly. I'm awfully glad you may stay. We'll go anywhere you like.'

Then, as the boy and girl went away, side by side, across the terrace garden, the doe, with her tinkling bell, trotting mincingly in front, the Rector rose from his chair and walked slowly to the far end of the bowling-green.

Several little matters had combined to displease Mrs. Crookenden. The black enamel lockets, set with diamonds, depending from her gold bracelets, rattled ominously as she slipped the ivory crochet needle in and out of the white wool. Only the interests of poor Lady Dorothy had kept her silent. With the exception of Kent Mrs. Crookenden increasingly failed to see the point of her late husband's family. Kent had been passed, so to speak, by the Hellards. That made a great difference. But now Kent himself elected to be annoying; for, on coming back, his first observation was—

'Those two young things make rather a pretty pair; eh, Caroline?'

The lockets rattled. The ivory needle went steadily in and out, in and out of the white wool. Mrs. Crookenden was never in a hurry.

'I have always strongly disapproved of first cousins marrying,' she said, as though delivering sentence.

The Rector sat down in his wicker chair again.

'My dear Caroline, you positively take one's breath away by your agility in jumping to conclusions. You leap to the ultimate possibility of a situation when the first word of the situation has barely been spoken.'

He leaned back, opened his coat, and stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat again.

'But I verily believe you women begin worrying about who your babies shall, and still more shall not, marry before the poor innocents are out of long clothes. It is the same with all of you. Your outlook is saturated with matrimony. In the present case, however, notwithstanding the acknowledged precocity of the rising generation, I don't think you need have much anxiety yet awhile. Still —since you have suggested the idea, Caroline—I may say that Lancelot might do worse, in my humble opinion, than set his affections on that young lady. If he does not, a good many others will, I fancy, in the course of the next ten years. I suspect she is going to grow into an uncommonly pretty little person. And the Hellard and Coudert strains are strong enough and far enough apart effectually to neutralise any evil results of cousinship on the Crookenden side, I should imagine.'

Mrs. Crookenden looked up. Her countenance presented an expanse of calm but solid displeasure.

'Really this discussion seems to me rather premature,' she said. 'They are mere children. And there are plenty of other people for Lancelot to marry besides your brother William's daughter.'

'Oh! dear yes, the world is wide,' rejoined the Rector, with his twitching smile. 'And Lancelot promises to be a handsome fellow, possessed of a handsome fortune moreover—a magnet with double power of attraction both to maidens and their mothers. He will probably have opportunities of playing pitch and toss to a large extent with the female heart if he chooses to avail himself of them. But I fancy he won't do that. He is a steady, persistent, dependable kind of being; whereas poor little Mary will change her mind, or not know it—which comes to much the same in the end—a good many times before she settles down. Her southern blood will always make it only too possible she should be out of harmony with her English surroundings.'

'Her dress is sufficiently out of harmony with them already,' Mrs. Crookenden remarked. 'And her accent is very peculiar. I have warned Carrie and Adela about it. I should be very sorry if they caught it. She uses most extraordinary expressions, too. Really, I think your brother William makes a dreadful mistake in leaving her so much with that negro nurse.'

'Mulatress,' interrupted the Rector.

But Mrs. Crookenden was not to be interrupted. She

was placid, she was judicial, but she clearly had put on the black cap in respect of little Mary Crookenden's up-bringing.

'I don't pretend to know what the degree of colour may be,' she continued. 'To me she is simply a negro woman—a woman who has been a slave, too. It is the most extraordinary arrangement. After his poor wife's death——'

'Ah,' said the Rector, very softly.

'It would obviously have been very much wiser if your brother William had dismissed her and engaged a proper English maid. It would have been much better, of course, to let that curious American element die out altogether.

Kent Crookenden crossed his legs, and patted one foot up and down reflectively on the gravel.

'Oh! no doubt there is much to be said for making a clean sweep after a funeral,' he remarked. 'Relics are a mistake. They sadly mitigate one's appreciation of the blessings of the present. The philosophy of forgetfulness is a very profound philosophy.'

As he spoke he was conscious of an almost painful scraping of his chest, caused by the fluted gold setting of a certain little miniature he wore on a black ribbon round his neck. Artistically considered it was a very worthless little miniature, feebly tentatively painted and ill-drawn. It represented a young girl of seventeen or eighteen in a prim bodice of a bygone fashion. The young girl's nose

was uncertain, her forehead and the lower part of her face were in two different planes. She had little Mary Crookenden's dark blue eyes and shaded fair hair. The Rector fancied the rim of the miniature must have caught against one of the buttons of his undershirt. He gave himself a shake to make it lie flat again.

'If Mary is to be an Englishwoman, then in common justice to her, her father should have her brought up like other children,' Mrs. Crookenden proceeded, in her calm, impressive way. 'Really, to-day, now, her appearance is most extraordinary. I am quite sorry for her, poor child. I am very glad we are alone. I should really regret her being seen except just by ourselves, you know. It is a thing one hardly likes to say of a relation, my dear Kent, but the poor child's appearance is positively vulgar.'

Mrs. Crookenden drew herself up and moved her lips as though she had a bad taste in her mouth.

'Dear me!' exclaimed the Rector. 'I had no idea Mary's red frock was so seriously compromising. We live and learn. Perhaps Mrs. Chloe's taste is a trifle barbaric. But she is a good, faithful soul, nevertheless. And she has taught my cook some excellent Creole dishes, so of course my mouth is stopped. I can't speak evil of her.'

'I am afraid her adulation of Mary is likely to put the poor child in a lamentably false position.'

'Or start her with a wholesome stock of belief in the kindness of her fellow mortals.'

Living alone had begotten a rather prosing habit in Mr. Crookenden, I fear.

'These are the two points of view, Caroline,' he went on. 'Nature takes care of most young things. Gives them nests, or holes, or burrows; affectionate, weak-minded parents to cuddle up against; warms, feeds, shelters them —does her best to put them in a lamentably false position, in short. It is a necessary economy of force, I suppose. For if the poor little wretches did not start with a few delusions regarding their individual importance and the amiability of their species, they would hardly have courage to go on living at all. Just the same takes place in the case of the small human animal. Nature provides it with a silly, doting mother to stand between it and awkward realities, and bolster up its poor little pluck with comfortable lies——'

He broke off abruptly, and gazed at some sea-gulls floating far overhead against the pale blue sky.

'Here there is no mother, you see,' he added, presently. 'And so perhaps the old slave-woman, who has a tender heart notwithstanding her loud taste in dress, may be better than nothing as a shelter to that sensitive little girl.'

Persons blessed with Mrs. Crookenden's description of temperament are not easily convicted of sin. Reproof usually presents itself to them rather as the result of an impertinence on the part of somebody else, than as the

result of misdoing on their own. Conscience, indeed, in them is magnificently altruistic—active merely in respect of others. In respect of their own conduct it is finely tranquil. Yet I must do Mrs. Crookenden the justice to state, that on the present occasion she really had a vague sense of standing reproved. It occurred to her that perhaps she had gone dangerously far, that she had occupied too advanced a position. She prepared to retire from it. But she retired sideways, crab-fashion, and with no violent haste.

'I think we may really leave the subject of little Mary now,' she said, graciously, but in tones of slight superiority. 'I daresay in time she may lose that unfortunate pronunciation. Possibly, as you say, she may grow up pretty. Some people admired her mother very much, I remember.'

The Rector stooped down and picked up a handful of small pebbles off the walk at his feet.

'I never admired her much myself. But then I cannot pretend to care for what is called American beauty.'

'There are Americans and Americans,' put in Kent Crookenden, parenthetically.

His sister-in-law's expression became increasingly gracious. She had removed the black cap. Turned counsel, all of a sudden, instead of judge.

'That is what dear Dorothy Hellard always assures me,' she said. 'By-the-bye, it is curious that our talk

should light on just this subject, because in a letter I had from her yesterday from Aldham Revel, she tells me there are some really charming Americans staying in the house. Dear Lady Aldham is quite in love with them. And that reminds me, Kent, didn't you tell me you were going to Midlandshire for some partridge shooting this month?'

The Rector was engaged in the intellectual pastime of throwing the pebbles, with extreme nicety of aim, one after the other, at a patch of grey lichen on the conservatory steps. Tap, tap, went the pebbles at regular intervals. He did not answer his sister-in-law till he had disposed of the last of them. Then he said, with a certain deliberation—

'Yes, I may go for a couple of Sundays, at the end of the month, if Ebsworthy can come over from Yeomouth and take the duty. I shall take Mary home to her father in Bristol, stay a week or ten days with him, and then go on to the Aldhams' probably.'

Mrs. Crookenden went through a rapid calculation.

'Dear me!' she exclaimed, 'how exceedingly provoking! You will just miss Dorothy. She leaves on the thirteenth.'

The Rector glanced up, while his mouth twitched into a not altogether encouraging smile.

'Well, Lady Dorothy will not be intolerably disappointed at that fact, I imagine. She will survive.'—Mentally he added, 'And so shall I.'

'She will be disappointed, very much disappointed,' asserted Mrs. Crookenden, quite warmly; 'and so will my aunt. You really must go sooner, Kent. Or let the negro woman take Mary home. You could go to Bristol just as well coming back.'

Mrs. Crookenden dropped her crochet into her large lap and leaned forward, looking at her brother-in-law with a singular mixture of command and amiable invitation.

'You are tiresome, Kent. You never will understand how glad people are to meet you.'

'Lady Dorothy and Lady Combmartin are remarkably kind. You are remarkably kind, too, Caroline,' he said; and he possessed himself of another handful of pebbles.

Mrs. Crookenden was not given to purposeless little movements and fiddlings; yet now she turned the enamel and diamond lockets about almost nervously.

'It is not easy to speak openly to you about certain matters, Kent,' she began. 'Still I feel I ought to put—to put—— Surely you see? Surely you cannot be blind to the fact that my aunt has a great regard for you, and that Dorothy—I am very greatly attached to dear Dorothy, you know, and——'

But the Rector held up his hand, pebbles and all.

'Pardon me, Caroline,' he said, very courteously. 'You place me in an awkward position. I can't let you say something we shall both regret; and yet in stopping you

I run the risk of appearing a conceited ass with a mightily good opinion of the estimation in which some persons hold him. Frankly I am not—and it is almost certain that I never shall be—in a position to marry.'

Mrs. Crookenden's imagination did not, as a rule, travel rapidly. But on the present occasion it bestirred itself. It took a most remarkable little journey. It suggested the most surprising ideas.

'Why not?' she demanded, with really appalling gravity.

If there had been a spice of malice in the Rector's way of making his announcement, that malice was fully gratified. He was greatly diverted at his sister-in-law's manner.

'For the most practical and conclusive of reasons. I have nothing to settle upon a wife.'

Mrs. Crookenden was so confused by the late excursion of her imagination, that she really could not speak.

'All that I have—I tell you this in confidence, Caroline—will go to my niece, Mary. I am going to cut off all superfluities. I intend to save for her.'

'But her father?'

'Her father won't have very much to leave her, I'm afraid. When he married he was a rich man; but the end of the American war left him with the world to begin over again, as far as his private fortune was concerned. All his money went down in the *Alabama*, or into the stomachs of Stonewall Jackson's soldiers.'

The Rector began throwing the pebbles one by one at the patch of lichen on the steps again.

'All this is most extraordinary,' said Mrs. Crookenden. Her crochet needle recommenced operations upon the white wool in a manner indicative of intense disapproval.

'Barring maternal affection, conjugal affection has, perhaps, the most perverting influence on the judgment,' the Rector said. 'William cared for his wife. His wife cared for the wide-verandahed Coudert Mansion down in Alabama, and for her father, and her brothers, and cousins. It is a heavy trial for any one, specially for a woman, to see the social order in which she was born and bred—whatever its inherent vices may be—crumbling into ruin under her feet and the feet of those she loves.'

The Rector paused. He had spoken with a strength of feeling by no means common to him. His sister-in-law never remembered to have seen him so much moved before. She was, however, one of those persons who are chilled rather than kindled by the emotions of others.

'I can only repeat that I am very much surprised,' she remarked. 'And that your brother William's conduct appears to me most eccentric.'

'It was unsuccessful in any case, as the event proved. The Coudert Mansion is a court of owls and bats by now, I suppose. The Coudert family is pretty well extinct. The *Alabàma* business cost the nation I forget how many

million sterling. And William's wife—oh! well, you remember all about that.'

The Rector got up and stretched himself, sticking his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat again.

'Thus do we spend our substance for that which profiteth nothing,' he said.

A footman came out through the conservatory and began clearing the table. Mrs. Crookenden rose, and moved slowly away down the bowling-green towards an arbour where her two brown-holland frocked little girls were playing with a small army of dolls.

'I cannot admit that you are under any obligation to make up to Mary for her father's recklessness,' she said to the Rector, as he walked beside her. 'I really fail to see why you should sacrifice yourself. I cannot see that it is any concern of yours.'

Kent Crookenden's heavy under jaw protruded in an absolutely aggressive manner.

'Ah!' he replied, 'all that would take too long to explain. I have my small eccentricities, too, Caroline. Lancelot will have his, some day, you'll see. They run in the blood.'

Just then the report of a gun, prolonged by a series of echoes, came from the breezy hillside across the valley.

'I hope that boy will be careful with his rifle,' exclaimed the Rector.

'Lancelot is entirely to be trusted,' rejoined Lancelot's mother, in her most superbly judicial manner.

Chapter II.

'I HATE boys,' sobbed Mary Crookenden.

She made this uncompromising statement in an extremely unconventional attitude, lying face downwards in the short crisp heath, while her poor, gaudily-clad, little shoulders quivered convulsively.

Lancelot knelt beside her. His smooth face was rather flushed, his slow, pleasant soul was greatly disquieted within him. The majority of his relations were not troubled with lively emotions; consequently his little cousin's attitude both of mind and body were surprising to him in a high degree. He had shot a rabbit. These passionate tears, this alarming declaration, were the result. It was all really very confusing. For rabbits were there to be shot. That was what you had them for. And then, only yesterday, had he not heard his Uncle Kent tell Eliot, the head keeper, they really must be kept under? They were becoming a perfect nuisance to the farmers. Lancelot would have been glad to explain this to his cousin. But words did not come readily to him. Moreover, it is difficult to make explanations to the back of a head, to a frock, to a sash, and a pair of open-work silk stockings. To set to work to justify your conduct to that part of your hearer which happens to be uppermost, demands an amount of self-confidence which Lancelot

did not possess. So he found nothing better to say than —'Please don't cry so, Polly.'

'I shall cry just all I want,' returned the little girl, in a stifled voice from out of the heath.

This reply was hardly encouraging. The boy looked at her helplessly. A queer sense of shyness was upon him. It gave him the oddest feeling to see her fair hair caught and strained by the upstanding shoots of heath. He grew hot. He wished she would move. He wished somebody would come. He was vaguely alarmed at being there alone with her. The violence of her emotion seemed to put him at a great distance from her, to make them strangers. Lancelot was at a loss how to cover that distance, and reopen friendly relations. But, above all, the sight of her fair hair tangled in the heath made him horribly uncomfortable.

'Polly,' he said, humbly, desperately, at last, 'please would you mind doing the rest of your crying sitting up?'

'I won't do anything you ask me to,' she sobbed out. 'You're cruel.'

As the Rector had said, the boy was persistent. He was hurt at the rebuff; yet he stuck to his point.

'But there are lots of spiders about here, you know, and tiger-beetles and things. I don't suppose they'd bite or sting you, but—well, I shouldn't like them to crawl over you, Polly.'

To his great relief this appeal was not without effect. The little girl raised herself slowly, reluctantly.

'Are you quite sure it's quite dead?' she asked, her breath catching between the words.

'The rabbit? Why, of course it is—dead as a nail.'

Mary's pale face was disfigured by tears. Her eyelids were swollen and red. She looked at him, moreover, with an expression of concentrated reproach and scorn, that was anything but complimentary. Still the boy's spirits rose. He felt more secure, more every-day and comfortable now he could see her face.

'There are no end of rabbits all over the place, you know,' he said. 'There are loads of them left, you know, Polly.'

'That one sat up. I saw it.'

'Oh! they can all sit up when they like, you know,' he rejoined, anxious to prove his victim was but as other rabbits are, not an abnormal, acrobatic genius among rodents.

Then Lancelot suddenly grew braver. He sat down on the carpet of heath close beside his cousin, dragged out his pocket-handkerchief—fortunately it was a clean one—and proceeded to dab her eyes gently with it.

'I'm awfully sorry you minded so much,' he said. 'If I'd known you'd mind I wouldn't have shot it, Polly, indeed I wouldn't. Please say you don't hate boys, Polly.'

Now his hand undoubtedly smelt of metal, of grease even, from much contact with the gun-barrel, and Mary was a dainty little person very sensible of small disgusts, yet she endured his attentions resignedly. For she was not strong. Anger, pity, tears had fairly tired her out. And physical exhaustion is uncommonly demoralizing. A weary body refuses to respond to the call of the virtues militant. It informs them almost peevishly that they are a bore. It entirely refuses to help them to go forth to war and rout about. Little Mary Crookenden wished to continue to deplore the untimely fate of the rabbit, wished to keep this young murderer in well-merited disgrace; but she was physically unequal to the exertion. Her sense of the enormity of the boy's crime began to give way before an instinctive demand for rest and sympathy. Her sobs grew faint and fainter, sinking down into an occasional long-drawn sigh. Her poor little head ached. Unconsciously she leaned against the late disturber of her peace, letting her aching head rest upon the flap of leather let in to the shoulder of his jacket.

Behind them the bracken and heather-clad slope swept upward some twenty or thirty yards to the edge of the cliffs that face the sea—here a clean drop of just upon three hundred feet to the grey beach below. Before them was a wide expanse of rough hilly country, intersected by a network of thickly wooded valleys, lying in warm misty shadow, save where the globular crown of an oak, or the

ragged head of a silver fir, overtopping the surrounding sea of foliage, caught the sunset light. Rising from the valleys, little fields, absurdly cocked up on end—green pasture, rich, red plough land, and yellow stubble around the glistering corn shocks, sleeping in a glory of golden haze. Above, again, a long hog's-back of hill, the straight line of it broken here and there by a few crooked trees bending away as though in terror from the stormy west, rose, dark purple, against the suffused radiance of the sunset sky.

And Lancelot Crookenden looked out over the shadowy woods and golden fields into that radiant sky, a sort of wonder in his young eyes. For the boy was making notable discoveries just then. They were honest, pure-minded discoveries, for he was blessed with the wholesome temperament which has a happy incapacity for making discoveries other than honest. All the same, I am afraid, could she have known of them, the discoveries in question—being made in this particular connection—would have met with his mother, Mrs. Crookenden's very sincere disapproval. For notwithstanding his love of cricket-bats, and fishing-rods, and guns, his distaste for Latin primers and Greek grammars, and the first book of Euclid and all the rest of that which directs the footsteps of reluctant English youth along the road of scholastic and academic honours, this quiet-natured, sturdy schoolboy was laying hold of what, after all, has inspired the finest fancies of

those classic poets whose lines he found it so abominably dull to copy and difficult to construe; of what has called literature, and art too, pretty well into existence; of what has, indeed, been the main agent in keeping life alive and the earth peopled ever since the day when Adam, waking from the strange deep sleep that fell on him in Eden, found Eve, new born, beside him—found woman, the secret of the Fall and of the Redemption, alike, lying hid as yet within her; and, in finding her, found also what she is fated for ever to carry along with her, the mystery, the glory, the cruel riddle and tragedy of sex.

Our fourteen-year-old, modern schoolboy however, let me hasten to add, apprehended this tremendous matter in its very simplest and most innocent expression. He was dumbly aware that a certain pleasure is derivable from mopping a little maiden's wet eyes, while her head rests languidly on your shoulder. It is an odd sort of pleasure, making you shy and bold, glad and awkward, all at once. It induces in you a most confusing jumble of opposing feelings. Yet, as a whole, the result is agreeable, distinctly agreeable. Lancelot went so far as to hope Mary would make no proposal of going home just yet.

But after a few minutes' silence the girl raised her head —'Listen,' she said; 'there is some one singing.'

Immediately below the spot where they were sitting the slope is crossed by a grass path, a winding ribbon of green amid the darker tones of the gorse and heath.

This path leads through a gnarled, moss-grown oak wood and past a couple of flat meadows lying at the bottom of the glen, to a dip in the wall of cliffs, known as Red Rock Mouth. Here the streams draining Slerracombe deer-park and the neighbouring valleys empty themselves, filtering down in a score of clear runlets through the purple-grey shingle into the sea.

And it was from this path, away to the right where it emerged from the covert and turned the shoulder of the hill, that the sound of voices, which had attracted Mary's attention, came. They were charmingly fresh young voices, with a curiously moving lift in them as they rose and fell on the light evening wind, giving out the wandering discursive tune of an old Methodist hymn—

> Oh! the pilgrims of Zion are a blessed band,
> Shout to the Lord of Glory!
> Like waving corn in a fruitful land
> In ranks round the great White Throne they'll stand,
> Shout to the Lord of Glory!

This sung with a certain fervour and conviction of triumph —sinking down suddenly into the wailing refrain—

> Lord, do not long delay,
> Lord, wipe our tears away;
> Through life's long earthly day
> See how we strive and pray.

As the singers, a company of some twelve or fourteen young men and women, came into sight, an instinct of

good breeding made Lancelot Crookenden move a little away from his cousin. He rose to his feet and stood beside her with a half-defined purpose of protection.

Notwithstanding their vocal lamentations over the troubles of this world, and warmly expressed desire for speedy translation to a more satisfactory one, the singers in question came along the grass path merrily enough, their shadows lying slantwise across the hillside in the tender sunlight. The young women walked first, clinging together in little groups, their light cotton dresses and quick movements making them seem like some flight of bright, fearless birds. There was a pretty gay grace about them as they turned, from time to time, to pass a word or two laughingly with the company of young men following behind.—Sailors and fisher-lads, wearing roomy pilot-cloth suits or close-fitting jerseys, loitering along, hands in trouser-pockets, in lazy, swinging, sea-going fashion. Handsome, well-made young fellows, some dark and fine-featured, others red-bearded and blue-eyed—eyes of a strange, dreamy blue that seem to reflect the joy and romance of the ocean as truly as they reflect its colour.

As the procession passed, most of the young women treated little Mary Crookenden to inquiring glances, and whispered to one another comments on her tearful appearance. Lancelot tried hard not to hear. He wished they wouldn't; what business was Polly of theirs?

The men were discreetly indifferent, though several touched their caps in passing. One of them, a tall, sunburnt, young sailor, paused a moment, and spoke.

'Parson Crookenden told us we might go down to Mouth, sir,' he said.

'Yes, I know, it's all right. How d'ye do, David?' the boy answered, flushing a little at this recognition of his proprietorship. 'Mr. Crookenden told us about it. I hope you've enjoyed yourselves.'

There was a tittering among the nearest group of girls.

'You've enjoyed yourself rarely, ain't you, Steve?' one of them called teazingly over her shoulder to a large, fair-haired, rather sheepish-looking man, walking a little apart from the rest.

David glanced at her sharply and then addressed Lancelot again civilly enough—'Yes, much obliged to you, sir. It's my sister Jenny's birthday, and nothing 'ud serve her and the other maids but they must have a picnic over to Red Rock.'

'Who's that?' Mary asked, as the sailor moved away. 'What made him look so cross?'

'Oh! that's David Parris. He's an awfully nice fellow; he's second mate on board Sir Reginald Aldham's yacht. But they've laid her up now because of getting back for the partridges. And then he comes home here, to Beera, for the herring-fishing. What makes you say he was cross, Polly?'

'The way he looked.'—Mary sighed, wearily, and put her hand up to her head.—'I suppose we ought to go. It must be ever so much more than half an hour. But I'm so tired, Lance. I don't believe I shall ever get home,' she said.

Lancelot paused before answering. A daring idea suggested itself to him. But the same instinct that had made him get up from beside his cousin a few minutes back, told him it would be more becoming not to put it into execution before spectators, and two fresh figures had just come upon the scene.

'If you didn't mind, I believe I could carry you all right, Polly,' he said. 'But here are some more of these Beera people. We'll let them get by first.'

In front walked a young woman, less well-dressed than those who had gone by already, but taller and more stately than they. The bodice of her old grey stuff dress was hardly full enough for the rounded bust it covered; while her scanty skirts clung somewhat closely to her limbs as she moved. One hand was full of trails of crimson and yellow bramble leaves. In the other she dangled a rather dilapidated black hat. Her complexion had the peculiarly rich bloom on it, born of the moist, warm, West Country climate, which is almost startling to inland eyes in its richness. The coils of her dark hair had become unfastened and hung untidily perhaps, but with an undeniably picturesque effect, below her waist.

Later in life this ripeness of colouring and opulence of physical development might degenerate into coarseness; but with the freshness of nineteen upon them they were unquestionably rather superb. Just now, too, the young woman's beauty was heightened by a pretty sharp fit of anger, that made her full lips tense, and quickened the light in her grey eyes. She carried her head erect, and swung along with a fine air of concentration. All the world might have looked on, she would not have cared a pin. She was entirely engrossed by her own not very amiable or agreeable sensations.

Following her rapidly along the grass-path, came a man of not, it must be owned, particularly prepossessing personal appearance. One might judge him to be three or four and twenty. He was high-shouldered. His clothes had seen better days. Yet the aspect both of them and their wearer established, even at first sight, a social distinction between him and the rest of the party. That he was a gentleman—in the wider application of that slightly offensive term—there could be no doubt, though he was by no means as responsible or even solvent looking an individual as the majority of the sailors and fisher-lads on ahead. Slung across his shoulders he carried a bulging satchel, while the end of a japanned colour-box stuck out of one of his jacket pockets.

Just before passing the boy and girl he stopped dead, and stood pushing up the moustache that lay like a rusty

brown bar across his face, staring meanwhile in a curiously restless, intimate, comprehensive sort of way at little Mary Crookenden.

On in front the singing had begun again, one fresh voice after another taking up the wavering tune.

> Oh! the pilgrims of Zion will find a sure rest;
> Shout to the Lord of Glory!
> Like tired birds in a swinging nest
> They'll be cradled to sleep on Abraham's breast,
> Shout to the Lord of Glory!

As the last words grew indistinct in the distance, Mary Crookenden rose to her feet. For a second or two she stood looking full at the stranger—her slim, fantastic figure flaming in the slanting sun-rays, against a background of purple-brown heather and withering bracken. Then she turned her back upon him with a very telling little movement of offended dignity. She thought him ugly. And, her uncle Kent and Chloe, her nurse, excepted, she strongly objected to persons who had the misfortune to be ugly.

'I am quite ready, now, Lance,' she said, rather imperiously, in her full grave tones. 'Do you hear? I want to go home. I can quite well walk. Who's that man?' she added, coming close to the boy. 'I don't like him.'

Lancelot was vaguely sensible of disliking the stranger also. Even more than of the inquiring young girls, he asked, 'What business was Polly of his?'

'One of those painting chaps from Beera,' he said,

with a flavour of contempt.—The arts do not, as a rule, appeal largely to the mind of the British public-school boy.—'There are a whole lot of them about in the summer always, you know. Are you sure you're not too tired to walk, Polly?'

'What does he paint?' Mary asked, with a sudden awakening of interest.

'Oh! all sorts of things. I'm sure I don't know, Polly—what they always do paint, I suppose. The village, and the quay, and the skiffs, and all sorts of things.'

'You mean he's an artist. Oh! how I wish I had known that. Why ever didn't you tell me at once, Lance? I wish I could speak to him.'

Poor Lancelot was greatly perplexed by this unexpected ardour. He did not understand it.—'Why, Polly, how changeable you are,' he exclaimed; 'two minutes ago you said you didn't like him.'

'But I didn't know he was an artist,' the little girl answered, quite excitedly. 'Do you think he'd show me his pictures? Do stop him, Lance, and ask him.'

She ran down into the grass path, all her late exhaustion forgotten, and looked anxiously after the high-shouldered young man.—'Lance, Lance, come here. Come directly. He isn't gone far yet. Do stop him,' she cried.

Meanwhile the painter had overtaken the young woman in the grey gown. He was speaking to her eagerly.

She paused, in obedience apparently to some question from him, and looked back.

'I can't see plain, Mr. Colthurst,' she said, impatiently. Her feelings were not under the best control, and she spoke in an unnecessarily loud tone. 'I can't see plain, the sun's in my eyes. But I expect it's the little Miss Crookenden as is staying up to parsonage over to Brattleworthy, with the black nurse.'

'Black nurse? How on earth does she come by a black nurse, Jenny?' he asked, stammering a good deal, and still looking in the direction of Mary Crookenden. 'That is most suitably picturesque.'

The masculine and feminine standpoints are notably different; and, let chivalry protest as it may, the former frequently has the grace of being the more modestly sensitive of the two. Even at fourteen promiscuous notice and interest appeared to Lancelot Crookenden to come perilously near insult. He was seized with a violent desire for escape. He did not want to hear any more.

'Come along, Polly,' he said, catching hold of his cousin's hand and bundling her down the hillside by a narrow rabbit-track, with most unceremonious haste.

'Oh! I wanted to speak to him,' she cried, breathlessly. 'Why do you mind, Lance? Let go my hand. You hurt. Why are you so rough?'

'He ought to have known we could hear,' the boy said, slackening his pace. 'I haven't really hurt you, have I,

Polly? But I call it awfully caddish to talk about you like that before your face.'

'But it's quite true what they said. I am staying at Brattleworthy, and I have got a darkey nurse. I'm glad, she added, reflectively, 'it is suitably picturesque to have a darkey nurse.'

Again Lancelot's soul was disquieted within him. Strange, new, incomprehensible feelings again stirred him; but he had ceased to find them pleasant, he had ceased to be glad. A vague, jealous displeasure possessed him. Was he unconsciously seeing further into, gaining a deeper experience of that same tremendous riddle of sex?

'What have you been crying for, Miss Polly?' the Rector asked her some half hour later.

Lancelot had gone indoors, and the two were walking down the beech and sycamore avenue running parallel to the high wall of the Slerracombe kitchen gardens.

'Oh! I was foolish, Uncle Kent. I cried because of the rabbit Lance shot. It squeaked, and that made me feel badly, and I was ever so angry. Lance was very sorry. He didn't mean to make me cry. He was ever so nice to me afterwards.'

Kent Crookenden stuck out his under jaw, and the corners of his mouth twitched slightly.

'The old story,' he said. 'A woman always likes to administer punishment herself—fall upon the culprit in hot haste herself, and then protect him vigorously from

the judgment of far juster judges. Well, you make a capital advocate, young lady, though your pleading has a touch of the personal note. The man who gets you to undertake his case will escape with a pretty light sentence, I fancy.'

Unfortunately, however, Mary's imagination was powerful. The remembrance of the rabbit's death shriek, of the scattered tufts of soft grey fur, of the shuddering blood-stained little body, was too much for her.

'It was such a nice one, Uncle Kent,' she said; 'and it put up its ears and sat up. And it looked so happy. Why must people kill things? It wasn't doing Lance any harm.'

'Ah! there we have an awkward question—a question neither you nor I shall get to the bottom of in a hurry, Miss Polly. Poor little rabbit, like a good many other people cut off in the midst of his days—and then the reason of it!'

He looked down smilingly at the girl, whose great eyes were wide with questioning pity.

'However, if he was a right-minded, well-conducted rabbit, no doubt he is safe in heaven by this time,' he added.

'I wish I believed that,' Mary answered, sadly. 'But Auntie Chloe says it's only men and women have got souls that go to heaven.'

'Does she, though, the old, spiritual aristocrat! And how does Mrs. Chloe come to know that, Polly? Has

she ever climbed up to heaven to ascertain for herself what gains admittance there and what does not ?'

'Well, Uncle Kent, I 'low you haven't climbed up there either,' Mary remarked.

The sun had just dipped below the western horizon. It threw up rays of widening brightness towards the zenith, while the park and the vast levels of the almost white sea beyond, stretched quiet, singularly reposeful, below that gigantic, pulsing fan of saffron and pale primrose light. Kent Crookenden stood a short space gazing at the serene landscape, at the noble immensity of ocean and sky, and then looked down at the slim, orange and scarlet figure clinging to his arm. The fluted gold setting of the faded miniature had ceased to scrape his chest.

'Ah! Polly,' he said, 'I am not so sure about that. I entertain a pleasing belief that I have been there once or twice, for a minute or so; and that heaven proved to be a far roomier place than most pious persons down here are willing to picture it.'

The miniature lay flat on his chest—an oval of weight, but a light one. In his own fashion, a silent one in this case, Kent Crookenden had personally, perhaps, solved the tragic, tormenting riddle of sex.

Still that night, as the statuesque mulatto woman was engaged in undressing her little mistress, when the latter —after a graphic account of the events of the day, her glimpse of the real but, alas! unattainable artist included

—ventured to touch on her uncle's delightful suggestions regarding the possible existence of celestial rabbit-warrens, Mrs. Chloe rejoined concisely—

'Don't you berlieve him, honey.' Adding, after a pause —'You'll find, Miss Mary, darlin', clever folks can talk a mighty 'mount of foolishness when dey done sot to.'

Chapter III.

It must have been past seven o'clock when Colthurst, and the young woman in the grey gown, turned off the main road at Beera Cross down the steep lane leading into the mile-long wooded combe, at the bottom of which lies the fishing village of Beera Mills. They had walked the four miles between Slerracombe and the cross road at a fair pace, still keeping, however, at some distance behind the rest of the party. Jenny still carried her head erect, and her face still wore an expression of annoyance. The young woman's power of self-control was regrettably limited. She felt strongly and reasoned little—a combination frequently leading to unfortunate complications.

The sun had set some time. But the sky was clear, and the twilight lingered, covering the shadowy woods and steep slopes of furze croft and fern-brake on either side the road with a mysterious dimness. Bats darted to and fro on flittering, leathery wings, hawking for unwary gnats

and flies. As the valley narrowed in descending, the hollow booming of the ground-swell came up from the rocky shore far below, the sound seeming to get entangled in the thick leafy wood, and to hang there in a hoarse, continuous murmur. Now and again the stillness was cut by the sharp bark of a dog at some farm upon the high ground inland, answered by the plaintive bleat of sheep or lowing of cattle—by a laugh or snatch of song from the party of young men and women on ahead—by the plash and tinkle of the stream in its deep channel by the roadside, overhung with hart's-tongue and fragile lady-fern, trailing St. John's-wort, and delicate lilac geranium—by a sudden shiver of air among the light foliage of the birches, their pale stems gleaming ghostly against the dark background of beech and oak. From the wood, too, came a moist clinging odour of earth and rotting leaves, that mingled with the pungent peaty smell of the moorland. Overhead, showing faint in the dusky blue of the evening sky, were a few stars.

An hour and a scene eminently adapted for the engendering of tender sentiments, for the perpetration of small follies. And now enter Corydon and Phyllis! One can guess only too accurately what is likely to follow.

I am bound to assert, however, that notwithstanding their provocatively poetic surroundings, this particular Corydon and Phyllis—Mr. James Colthurst, younger son of the late Dr. Ridley Colthurst, whose eloquence for so

many years drew overflowing congregations to St. Saviour's Chapel, at Tullingworth (the living, it may be remembered, is in the gift of the Simeon trustees), and Jane Parris, daughter of William Parris, sometime able seaman now fisherman, of Beera Mills and local preacher among the Bible Christians of his native village and of the neighbouring parishes of Brattleworthy and Codd's Camp—that when these two young persons had passed the small church, clinging against the hill-side, and reached the deeper gloom cast by the steep woods on either side of the way, they appeared quite unlikely to take advantage of the excellent opportunity for love-making afforded them by their present circumstances. For Colthurst knew that his companion was the long-promised bride of her cousin Stephen Kingdon, a young sailor just home from a voyage to Odessa. While Jenny was vaguely but momentarily growing more convinced that whoever in the future might become Mrs. James Colthurst, that high privilege was not reserved for her.

This growing conviction—a painful one, it must be owned, to poor Jenny—was in part, at all events, the result of the young man's present conversation. Colthurst had a bad habit of holding forth upon any subject that happened to be uppermost in his thoughts, without careful consideration of its suitability to the feelings or intelligence of his hearers. He had a necessity for self-expression. For the last mile he had talked eagerly

and persistently, regardless of very clear indications of vexation on the part of his companion. Perhaps Colthurst did not altogether object to vexing Jenny a little. She looked prodigiously handsome when she was angry.

'It was not only the child's dress,' he said, 'which made her so original. It was the startling contrast between her dress and her expression. At first it seemed as if she was got up for a masquerade. There was a touch of positively tropical splendour about her. And then when you looked again you were reminded of all sorts of cold, pure, transparent things, of ice and snow. There was something polar, absolutely polar, in her little white face and those great eyes. They are that purple-blue, by the way, you only see in high mountain tarns.'

The young man's speech was low and rapid, with a hissing prolongation of the sibilants. It was frequently broken by a hesitating stutter before certain consonants. This stutter increased distressingly under excitement. Colthurst frequently, indeed, found himself seriously inconvenienced by it. He was naturally somewhat irritable, and this thorn in the flesh, this inability to get his words out, caused him keen provocation, often making him shy and awkward just when he wanted most to carry things with a high hand. Alone with Jenny Parris, however, his tendency to stammer was agreeably in abeyance.

'I have not seen anything so suggestive, so downright pathetic in the way of a child's face for a long time,' he

went on. 'By the side of that stolid boy she looked like an exquisite little bit of Venetian glass beside a common earthenware beer mug. You say she is staying at Brattleworthy, Jenny. Tell me some more about her.'

'I don't know any more, Mr. Colthurst, and what's more I don't want to,' the girl replied, impatiently. 'She came down along one day last week—you were painting old Mr. Fulford up to Withacott—and she'd got a great, ugly, black woman along of her, just like the figure-head Aunt Sarah Jane's got put up in the garden. The children run and scritched as if they'd met a dragon. I don't want to see her again. She was just the hideousest creature I ever set eyes on.'

Colthurst revelled in incongruities. There was unquestionably a sinister vein in him, a rather morbid enjoyment of all that is strange, jarring, unexpected, abnormal. Some persons, indeed, have gone so far as to accuse him of a love of actual physical deformity and a relish of horror for mere horror's sake. But this accusation, I think, is unjust. No doubt his power of appreciation was widely catholic, his view of beauty an original one. Yet he invariably, as far as I could see, rejected that which was unnatural or unsavoury, unless the presentation of it formed so essential a part of his subject that to omit it was to spoil the point of the story. If it was a necessary part of the drama, he portrayed it with an honest and fearless hand. And that he probably enjoyed doing so I am not

prepared to deny. In truth, the number of artists—in any department—who have the gift of calling spades spades, rather than agricultural implements, is a very small one. To ask them not to exercise this distinguishing gift, when they do possess it, is a trifle hard. A trifle useless, too, perhaps; for unless they are contemptibly false to the demands of their own talent they certainly will not listen to you.

In the present case the notion of the swarthy nurse and little Miss Crookenden going down Beera Street, while the small natives scuttled away in terror, struck Colthurst as pleasantly grotesque.

'They must have made a delicious pair,' he remarked; 'I wish I had seen them. Go on; tell me some more, Jenny. Hideousest is very good in its way, but I want more detail, more local colour. How was the black woman dressed, now?'

'Like a guy,' returned Jenny, promptly.

Colthurst glanced at her in some amusement. He was beginning to know the tones of the young woman's voice remarkably well. They were most expressive. Jenny, so her companion held at least, was a book printed in very large type and easy enough to read. He proceeded to try and read a little further.

'But did you happen to observe the child's face carefully when we saw her just now?' he went on. 'She had been crying. It is not often a child cries to such good

purpose. She was the embodiment of a whole tragic poem, with those red-brown eyelids, and blanched cheeks, and that glaring frock. Just the kind of subject I care for. It taxes both one's imagination and one's technical skill. Don't imagine these remarks are a bid for tears on your part though, Jenny,' he added, glancing quickly at her again. 'They would not suit you, they are not in your style.'

'Whether they'd suit me or no you'd not get mun for the asking, I can tell you, Mr. Colthurst,' she rejoined, hotly.

Colthurst smiled as he pushed his moustache up from his lip. It was really a pity the shadow of the woods was so deep just here, for he could not see Jenny's face clearly; for he was under an impression that she was pre-eminently well worth seeing clearly at this moment, as she swung down the steep road by his side—her action as free yet as well-poised and harmonious as that of some Amazon on a Greek frieze.

'Shouldn't I get them, Jenny?' he said. 'Well, fortunately I don't propose asking for them, at all events not just yet. When I pack up my traps and bid good-bye to you and your delightful Beera you may pay me the tribute of a few tears if you like. I shall not be there to see the doubtfully satisfactory after-effects of them. I suppose it is really a merciful dispensation of providence that most women are anything but engaging when they

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have been crying,' he continued. 'For if they looked as that child did, one might be tempted to torture them from time to time—moderately of course—just for the pleasure of sitting down and staring at them afterwards.'

Jenny made no immediate reply, but flicked at the bats circling about her head with the old black hat she still carried in her hand. Presently, however, disappointment getting altogether the upper hand, she broke out inconsequently :—'She's a proud enough little image, I'll be bound. They all are, those Crookendens—a proud, stuck-up lot. The boy's the best of 'em, though you do liken him to a beer-mug, Mr. Colthurst. He's been on board the yacht a time or two with Parson Crookenden and Sir Reginald; and Dave says a nicer, freer-spoken, civiler young gentleman they never had aboard of her.'

'Oh! no doubt. He is just the sort of sleek, well-conditioned, young prize animal everybody is safe to admire. That is exactly why I don't admire him, you see, Jenny. His good looks are altogether too obvious.'

'They don't belong to the place neither, those Crookendens don't,' the girl continued, glad to get hold of any subject upon which to vent her ill-humour without, as she flattered herself, betraying the real cause of it. 'The old man came from Bristol and bought it when Squire Tremenheer died. There was Parrises living down to Beera two hundred years ago and more, Mr. Colthurst, before ever these Crookenden folks came about. If you don't

believe me you can see it in the registers Parson Hawley keeps in the strong box up to church. Many's the time I've heard Aunt Sarah Jane and father tellin' about mun. If you don't believe me, Mr. Colthurst, just go and see mun for yourself.'

Her vehemence greatly amused the young man. But Colthurst's amusement was of the observant, intellectual kind which rarely finds expression in laughter. For laughter, if it is genuine, usually implies a certain leisurely element in the mind,—a power of mental standing still and contemplating oneself and that fraction of the universal economy immediately submitted to one's notice in an easy, after-dinner attitude. It is hardly too much to say that James Colthurst's mind never stood still. It went on and on, as his quick, noiseless footsteps went on now down the winding road, driven forward by the workings of strong, restless energy within. He was always thinking, doing, feeling, experiencing something—and that a perfectly definite something. Always registering impressions, making observations, always feeding his somewhat lurid imagination with visions of future influence and renown. Such a man has little enough time to waste in the society of dear, comfortable, lazy Laughter, with its epicurean acquiescence in things in general—itself included—its genial enjoyment of small surprises, and kindly gossipy appreciation of the manifold absurdities so continually visible in the ways of this cranky world. Colthurst re-

garded the world as a nut to be cracked, an oyster to be opened; at best as a battlefield whereon his talent and determination might win a great victory. The victory was some way off yet, for the young man's hopes were considerably happier than his present fortunes. But Colthurst had faith in himself.

From the foregoing statement it must not be supposed that James Colthurst was one of those fortunate beings who, proposing to themselves the attainment of certain objects, proceed to walk straight along the shortest and surest road to the said objects, never looking either to the right hand or the left. He had two distinct sides to his nature which were for ever playing a game of skill, so to speak, with each other. Sometimes the intellectual side had the game all its own way. And then suddenly the emotional side, which had seemed curiously slow and short-sighted as to its opportunities of gaining the advantage, would in a few skilful moves come to the fore and cry *check*, before its opponent had had time to organise any sufficient system of defence. Plurality of personality is very impeding and dislocating. To manage one human being is often hard enough work, heaven knows! But to manage two—of whom the first is ardent, passionate, reckless, sensuous, sensitive, and the second strong, hard, ambitious, doggedly self-confident and self-assertive—joined together in an indissoluble bond of wedlock, this is indeed a task from which a man, without any

notable defect of moral courage, may well cry for deliverance.

Now, as Colthurst heard Jenny Parris' unnecessarily vigorous defence of the respectability of her own lineage, saw the toss of her handsome head as she swung down the road in the clinging dusk, the emotional side of his nature made a move forward. He was amused at her vehemence, but he was by no means displeased at it. He stopped and looked at her, leaning both hands on the knob of his walking-stock.

'Up-p-on my word,' he said, in that rapid whispering way of his, and with an access of stammering, 'if I was a conceited fellow, Jenny, I should b-begin to flatter myself you were paying me the compliment of growing slightly jealous.'

Jenny had paused also. She drew herself up to her full height. She was very nearly as tall as the young man, and the evening dimness seemed to magnify the proportions of her fine figure. She folded her arms, holding her head well back. Jenny's attitudes were instinctively dramatic.

'Well,' she answered, rather magnificently, 'perhaps I am a bit jealous. And some of the others would be jealous too, I expect, if they'd heard you tellin' and tellin' about that little Crookenden maid like you have all the way back from Slerracombe. Of course I know well enough you ain't one of us, Mr. Colthurst. Your people are gentlefolks, and when you see gentlefolks you begin hankering

after mun. It's nature, I suppose; you can't help yourself. But you've lived along of us gettin' on for six months, and our ways have been good enough for you. And now it 'ud aggravate a saint, that it would, to hear you so taken up with a little peaked-faced bit of a maid, just because——'

The girl broke off abruptly, and flicked at the bats with her old hat again.

'Just because what, Jenny?' inquired Colthurst.

'Oh, you needn't pretend you don't know, Mr. Colthurst,' she replied, her voice rising in scornful emphasis. 'Why, just because you think she's a bit better than us. I tell you us Parrises are as good as those Crookenden people any day. But the only gentlefolks that go for anything worth namin' are the ones as have the money.'—Jenny began striding down the hill again.—'We've bin deceived in you, Mr. Colthurst,' she said, fiercely. 'We ain't of any account with you after all, though you have let on to seem so friendly, coming out along of us to-day when Dave asked you and all. There, then; go along back to your gentlefolks if you're so set on 'em, Mr. Colthurst—that's all I've got to say.'

These last words appeared to the young man to have a decided flavour of sarcasm about them. They nettled him considerably.

'They would be so d-delighted to receive me, wouldn't they?' he replied, stammering badly. 'A poor, seedy

devil of a painter, worse dressed than their footmen, is so likely to find the doors of great houses thrown open to welcome him. As you very truly observed just now, money is the only thing that tells—not talent, not birth. It d-doesn't matter who you are or what you can do, if your pockets are empty you go under.'—Colthurst set his teeth and cut savagely at the ferns edging the brook. —'But I tell you p-people are a good deal mistaken if they imagine I am going to stay under. I know the worth of my work if no one else does. The world will have to reckon with me one of these days. And I'm not soft. It's bound to come in time. I can wait.'

The girl made no answer. Often she had but a vague understanding of her companion's talk. It was, to use a colloquialism, very much over her head. And then, as in the present case, it seemed to widen the social distance between them cruelly. Poor Jenny dumbly but very bitterly resented all such widening.

About half-way down the combe a bridge of rough slabs of slate spans the brook, and gives access, by means of a gate, to a rutted cart-track leading up through the wood to a disused stone-quarry. This cart-track is bordered, for the first thirty yards or so, by a larch plantation, which, as the evening air stirred the branches, gave off a resinous fragrance. Colthurst paused and turned aside to inhale it. These fresh woodland scents were peculiarly delicious to him. There is a certain

unhistoric purity, so to speak—a disconnectedness with man and the doubtfully profitable ways of him—in the odours and aspects of sylvan vegetation that is eminently refreshing. To Colthurst his fellow mortals were absorbingly—in a sense, offensively—interesting. They possessed such splendid powers; and were, at the same time, to his thinking, so hopelessly weighted by stupidity; nearly all of them so obstinate, so secure of their individual infallibility, yet so few of them grasping their own lives as a whole and knowing definitely what they purposed doing with the years of nights and days accorded to them upon this very extraordinary planet. And it was just because of his strong and constant consciousness of the claims and all the perplexing phenomena of humanity, that the unhumanity of the woods so attracted him. Trees rooted always in the same place—permanent, peaceful, resigned, undesiring beings, with their marvellous complexity and variety of beauty, their passionlessness—these pleased him better than the birds and insects, whose lives are, on a simpler scale, and in primitive proportions, ruled by the same needs, and motives even, as our own; better than the emotional, fugitive loveliness of flowers; better than the streams, hurrying so restlessly, persistently towards annihilation in the sea; better than the sea itself, majestic though it is in its mateless, unfruitful immensity and strength.

The effect upon Colthurst of a few seconds' communing

with the larches was soothing, and found expression in the more amiable tone he adopted towards Jenny Parris. He imagined her silence to be the result of sulkiness. He was aware of having been somewhat egotistic during their walk together this evening, and of having omitted to pay her words—Colthurst had so far abstained from mere objective testimony to his admiration for her good looks—the amount of personal attention she unquestionably liked.

'Come, Jenny,' he said, presently, 'what is the use of our quarrelling? Let us wait here a little while. There is no hurry, and, at this rate, we shall overtake the others almost directly. You needn't grudge me a few minutes' chat. You will have plenty of Steve Kingdon's society when I am gone—have it for the remainder of your and his natural lives, in fact. A little abstinence now will probably increase your appetite for it. And it is well to begin, at all events, with a large appetite for the inevitable.'

Jenny had turned to him quickly when he began speaking. But now she moved away impatiently towards the rough bridge.

'What is there to be so cross about, after all?' Colthurst continued, following her, his interest in the girl increasing in proportion to her apparent indifference. 'You may just as well behave prettily to me while I am here. You can behave uncommonly prettily, you know, Jenny, when you like. I shall have a dreary enough time of it

grinding away at pictures which that great composite idiot, the British Public, hasn't the sense to understand and buy, when I go up to London again. Whereas you have no end of splendours ahead. You'll be thinking of being married, and having a smart house in Yeomouth and coming out as no end of a fine lady, if Steve gets a good berth. Will you ever think of me, I wonder, Jenny? Will you send me an invitation to the wedding?'

'There won't be no wedding,' she answered, tossing up her head. 'Me and Steve's parted. We had words about it to-day. He swears he wouldn't have me now if I kneeled down to ask it of him.'

Colthurst drew in his breath with a queer little hiss.—'Wouldn't he? More fool he,' he said.

Jenny crossed the bridge and leaned her elbows on the top bar of the gate. She was not much given to tears, but at this moment they rushed hot and smarting into her grey eyes. For she was very miserable, poor child; and it was only vanity which kept her from crying. Had not Mr. Colthurst intimated that tears in all probability would be anything but becoming to her?

Colthurst, meanwhile, was considerably startled by the piece of information just conveyed to him. It made a difference in his relation to his companion.

'W-why have you and Steve parted?' he inquired.

The girl hesitated.—'Steve didn't fancy you paintin' me so often.'

'Oh! I am the serpent in paradise, am I?' Colthurst exclaimed. 'Really, Mr. Stephen Kingdon's susceptibilities are remarkably easily aroused.'—He paused; and then said, rather hardly, 'I have never made love to you—honestly now, Jenny—have I?'

'No, never,' she answered, the words, for all her desire not to cry, shaken by a sob. Then Jenny straightened herself up, and broke out stormily—'But they won't believe that. They're, all of mun, always on at me about you—except Dave. Father's always tellin', and then Aunt Sarah Jane, she must go and chime in. She's always been set against Steve and me marryin', and she's pleased enough to take hold of this about you and the paintin'. She's always spying on to me, and publishing tales about my carryin' on till the town rings with 'em.'

Colthurst drew the end of his moustache between his teeth and bit it with a sort of rage. He was immensely annoyed at this revelation of local gossip. He had been very happy—happy, that is, in so far as is possible to a person of his restless, feverish imagination—during his six months' sojourn at Beera Mills. He had gone down there sore from disappointment caused by the rejection of two of his pictures—they sold years afterwards, I remember, for large sums of money—by the Royal Academy. And the shrewd, humorous, handsome fisher-people had been kindly and cordial towards him. Colthurst was very sensible of kindness, not having met with any great super-

fluity of it so far—by his own fault, in part, no doubt. He had felt grateful to them. And gratitude had a softening, sweetening influence upon him. He held, too, that his conduct in respect of Jenny Parris had been really irreproachable. He had let her see, no doubt, something of the admiration in which he held her remarkably ripe and vigorous beauty. That had been unavoidable. But a sense of *noblesse oblige* had prevented his indulging in tender passages with her. And now he found himself accused of an ordinary vulgar intrigue! It was immensely annoying. And Colthurst was, possibly, all the more conscious of his own unimpeachable virtue and the odious injustice of the public, because his code of ethics in questions of the affections was not a very stringent one. His personal vanity was somewhat wounded moreover. For he saw he had been mistaken concerning the root of Jenny's ill-temper. It arose not from jealousy, which would have been complimentary; but simply from chagrin at the loss of her old sweetheart.

Colthurst had followed the young woman across the rough bridge. Now he stood a couple of steps behind her, inwardly cursing the censorious impertinence of the inhabitants of Beera Mills.

Finding he did not answer her, Jenny turned away hopelessly, and leaned her elbows on the top of the gate again. Her voice was thick with tears she still struggled not to shed, as she said—

'Oh! it's a poor life for a motherless maid up to our place—always short of money and put to shifts. It was bad enough when half the takin's went in liquor, but we'm worse off than ever now father's gone and got religion like he has. Days and days he won't put the boat out because he's going flacketting over to Nettlecombe or up to Codd's Camp to preachin's and prayer-meetin's and anniversaries. He says the Lord's given him higher work to do than the fishin'. All I know is, the herrin's paid best. And so I'm forced to wear this old gown that's a shame to be seen beside the other maidens'. Fay, what's that?' she cried out, shrilly, reeling back from the gate right against James Colthurst as he stood beside her.

Only a white owl sailing out from among the fragrant larches, beating silently a little way down the road, and then disappearing, with a weird, half-human laugh, into the wood across the glen. The worthy bird was wholly intent on personal matters—probably matters of supper. Like Esau of old, he was in search of savoury meat such as his soul loved—a belated field-mouse, for instance, or some other succulent, defenceless creature in fur or feathers. But we all of us, at times, I suppose—owls included—though, in our own opinion, going very innocently about our private business, appear as the messengers of fate to others, and set in motion those mysterious magnetic currents that determine, for joy or sorrow, the future of other lives. So to half-educated, superstitious Jenny

Parris, in the midst of her present excitement and keen self-pity, the greedy, wide-winged barn-owl appeared as she knew not what vision of supernatural terror. And before she could recover herself Colthurst's arms were round her. He had flung them out instinctively to save her from falling.

It was all done in a very brief space of time. Flint struck steel, and the flame leapt up; for, as the young man felt the girl's heart beat fast under his hand, in the moist dimness of the twilight, with only those few faint stars looking on, the emotional side of his nature, unfortunately, made a resistless dash right across the board, and, almost before the cool, calculating side realized what had happened, cried *mate.*

'Jenny, Jenny,' he said, hoarsely, a singular vibration in his voice.

Jenny started, drew back a little, looking him full in the face, her lips parted, and an intense though silent inquiry in her eyes. Still she did not make any effort to shake herself free of his arm.

A long sighing draught of air crept up the valley, cool off the sea, bearing on it the sullen booming of the ground-swell, and the voices of the young men and women, sad and sweet, as they rose once more in the refrain of the old hymn—

> Lord, do not long delay!
> Lord, wipe our tears away.

Through life's long earthly day
See how we strive and pray.

And somehow, before the last lingering, plaintive notes died away, Colthurst's and Jenny's lips met. It was not all his doing. Jenny raised her proud head, not unwilling to give as well as to receive that first kiss. Then they moved apart, and stood looking strangely at each other through the colourless dusk.

Colthurst was the first to speak. The emotional side still had the upper hand, and he did not choose his words very wisely.—'Upon my word,' he said, 'I b-believe you have a little liking for me, Jenny, after all.'

'Liking!' she cried, with something between laughter and a sob. 'Why, I'd walk round the world barefoot after you, Mr. Colthurst; you know it.'

But as it happened the young man had not known it.

'G-good Lord,' he stammered, under his breath.

Putting up his hand and thrusting the fingers inside his turned-down shirt collar, he dragged it outward. It seemed to choke him. He was fairly confounded.

If he had been playing unadvisedly with edged tools, he seemed likely to get cut with a vengeance. For an instant it occurred to him that all this—the lonely walk, the girl's lamentation—was a conspiracy, which had been planned beforehand and carried out by the help of a third person. Colthurst's opinion of the honour of his fellow-creatures was not an exalted one. Most of them were capable

he thought, of exhibiting alarming ingenuity in compassing their own ends. But he rejected this explanation, after momentary reflection, in disgust. These fisher people were unsophisticated, and there was a sturdy independence about them. They were too proud, he believed, to stoop to a dirty trick of that description. Moreover there had been a ring of honesty in poor Jenny's crude declaration of affection that was indisputable.

All these thoughts flashed through Colthurst's brain with amazing rapidity. But to Jenny, in her present condition of unruly excitement, the pause seemed intolerably lengthy.

'You'm playing with me, Mr. Colthurst,' she cried, her voice quivering with passionate emotion. 'You've been and made me tell. You wouldn't let me be. You knew it well enough all along, but you think it rare fun to bring me down and shame me. I liked Steve well enough till you come, but now I can't abear the sight of him. Why ever did you come here, and tell to me, and make me love you? I'll never be able to hold up my head in Beera again. They'll all sneer and throw it up against me that —that——"

I suppose it was reprehensibly weak of James Colthurst, but Jenny's voice rising in piteous anger and despair was a little more than he could endure.—'Hang it all!' he said, desperately. Then he took the girl in his arms again, and held her.

'Poor, d-dear, beautiful, foolish Jenny,' he said, in that

quick, broken, whispering way of his. 'There, kiss me again. D-don't cry so. There, it's all right. I love you. Will that pacify you, Jenny? Upon my word, I love you.'

Chapter IV.

Beera town consists of some forty or fifty slate-roofed, whitewashed houses, clustered together at the lower end of the valley where it opens in a great green V upon the Atlantic. Before you are three thousand miles of ocean, clear and free, so the natives with their little turn for fine phrases tell you, to Labrador. Behind you, working back inland, turning upon itself like some gigantic serpent, is the long wooded combe. A bit of a very primitive world, this. For probably the distribution of moorland, wood, and water is almost the same now as when the Roman legionaries began constructing the road up above, which runs due west—straight as a bee-line, up hill and down dale—from the pleasant, steep-streeted town of Yeomouth, on the estuary of the tide river, to Buckland Head, the extreme point of the iron-bound coast. The road has a certain dignity and impressiveness about it, though given over in these days chiefly to farmers' and fish-jowders' carts, to carriers' hooded vans, and donkeys labouring under bags of sand or panniers full of herrings. For it shows blanched and yellowish as the coarse grasses of

the marsh and bog it here and there crosses, cutting its way across the face of the country fearlessly and relentlessly, unswerving as the forward march of civilisation which it seems to typify.

Beera, however, as has already been shown, lies well off the course of the high road. Forward-marching civilisation, even in its modern form of the ubiquitous tourist, has left the little place fairly unmolested as yet. The first few cottages in the street stand back, each set in a patch of steep garden, bright with the glossy leaves and pink, blue, and lilac heads of hydrangeas, while tall red-stemmed fuchsias, myrtles, and Virginian creeper—at this season of the year all colours from buff to dark crimson—are trained against their white-washed walls. In two or three places are agreeably original linhays or donkey stables—an oblong enclosure of tarred planks, roofed in with a derelict herring boat turned keel upwards. In front of the cottages, the stream brawls along its rocky channel, crossed by half a dozen little bridges, made, like that in the wood, of purple-grey slabs of slate. At the back of them rises some five hundred feet of rough pasture and common-land, very much set up on end. In places it is broken up into small potato fields, but for the most part retains its original character of sheep-walk and warren.

As you get into the heart of the village the houses gather closer together; until at last they seem to jostle each other, actually to crowd and climb upon each other

in their anxiety to witness all that goes forward in the level unpaved space commonly known as The Square. This, indeed, forms the *grande place* of Beera town. It is fronted on the left by the low, dusty buildings of the flour mill; the great, brown, creaking, dripping wheel of which is turned by a branch of the stream. Towards the sea the exits from the square are twofold. One, a narrow passage between a couple of green-balconied houses, ends in a flight of steps, leading up to a row of tumble-down red cob cottages that cling to the very edge of the cliff some fifty feet above the beach. The other, a slanting rocky road blasted out of the cliff-face, protected by a low wall, and supported in places by huge buttresses of masonry, leads down to a limekiln—partially blocking the end of the gulley through which the stream empties itself—and to the small, grey, sickle-shaped pier, which guards the quay pool, and the boats and skiffs moored in it from the fury of the western sea.

Both place and people strike you, at once, as having a curiously foreign aspect. The former closely resembles one of the picturesque and inordinately smelly fishing villages—Beera, save for an all-pervading odour of herrings in the late autumn, is sweet enough—that nestle at the foot of the Apennines along the beautiful Ligurian coast. The people, however, dark-skinned and black-haired though so many of them are, do not approximate to the soft and too often fleshly Italian type. They have a

neatness of make, a keenness and fineness of feature, a native dignity of bearing, a certain hard strain, in short, in their good looks, which differentiates them sensibly from the natives of the Riviera.

I cannot vouch for the truth of the story, but tradition tells how, in the year of grace 1588—when Nature took up her parable against foreign aggression, bidding stars in their courses, wind, wave, and tempest fight against that grim and bloody-minded prince, Philip the Second of Spain, and scatter the wrecks of his Invincible Armada on all the British coasts—a Spanish galleon, driven into Yeomouth Bay by stress of weather, was cast away upon the long reef of black rock that runs out from the back of Beera Quay. Tradition tells, further, how the swarthy southern sailors, worn, storm-tossed and disheartened, made their way up—the few that escaped of them—sadly and humbly into the little, white-walled, English town; and cried to each other, even as the weary seamen of Odysseus cried to each other, resting on the yellow sands of that strange land 'in which it seemed always afternoon'—cried that they would 'return no more;' but forgetting home, and wife, and child, the vineyards and pomegranates, the song and dance, the sunshine, and the cruel tyranny of Spain, they would stay here for ever in the fair, smiling, tender-hearted West Country.—And so, indeed, like Odysseus' seamen they did stay. But with this slight difference, that whereas the old Greek sailors spent their time sluggardly,

lying on beds of 'amaranth and moly,' and muddling their brains with lotus eating, these other castaways spent theirs in the more profitable occupation of catching ling, and cod, and hake, and herring; and in wandering—the younger and more sentimental of them, I suppose—waist-deep in bracken and purple foxgloves on the hillside; or mingling their rich, sonorous, foreign speech with the cry of the plover and laugh of the gulls, and the long-drawn, sibilant murmur of the sea, as they sat on the short turf beneath the white hawthorn thickets in the springtime and talked of the land they would never see again. Tradition adds finally—but then tradition is a suspiciously wide-mouthed gossip—that the dark-browed seamen found favour in the sight of the slim West Country maidens, so that these married them and bore them beautiful wild-eyed children, whose descendants remain at Beera even unto this very day.

This legend, whether true or false, had pleased Colthurst's fancy from the first. It was very present to him now, on the night of Jenny Parris' birthday party at Red Rock Mouth.

The young man still found himself in a rather perturbed state of mind, unable either to draw or to read. So he loitered out from his lodgings at a green-balconied house in the Square, and sat down on the sea-wall guarding the road to the quay. Jenny had gone home to one of the red cob cottages perched on the edge of the cliff some

time ago. And the last of the herring-boats, not without a shouting from the men and splashing of the long sweeps as the wash struck her in rounding the pierhead, had sailed out to take up her place and drift all night with the rest of the fleet dotting the bay. Beera town was silent, having apparently put on its nightcaps, and put out its candles, and retired discreetly to bed. The only sounds were those of the stream rushing down the gulley, and the growling grind of the ground-swell among the loose pebbles of the beach.

Colthurst sat with his back to the sea, staring aimlessly at the wall of rock across the road. He thought of Jenny Parris and of the shipwrecked Spanish sailors, wondering whether the story might not very well be true—whether the girl, indeed, might owe some of her stately beauty and the violence of her emotions alike to this old strain of alien blood. Her lately-declared passion for himself had an exotic flavour; a heat, a suddenness, a dash of reckless romance, very unlike the ordinary orderly, humdrum loves of the ordinary, sober Briton. And this exotic vehemence of Jenny's love piqued and gratified Colthurst. It was distinctly moving and exciting. He wondered how it would end.

Yes, began to wonder that already. For in his present solitude the cool reasonable side of his character soon began to take up the game again. Colthurst was becoming disagreeably aware that he had ended by making a very

sufficient fool of himself and talking a large amount of abominable nonsense between the gate into the wood and the first cottages in Beera Street. And the awkward part of it was that he could not remember exactly what he had said. He honestly wished not to deceive the young woman or wrong her; and in the heat of the moment he might have been betrayed into making her promises it would be impossible to keep. Any person of average sense would know that promises made under such circumstances are subject eventually to very liberal discount. But then there came in the question, was Jenny Parris, in this particular matter, to be reckoned a person of average sense?

Colthurst shifted his position slightly. No doubt it was all very romantic; but, he knew well, it is possible to pay too heavy a price for your romance. Had he not seen more than one young man, in his own profession, whose career had begun with a very fair measure of promise, hopelessly handicapped, condemned to the everlasting production of *potboilers* by an early marriage or less honourable form of entanglement? The situation was as common as lying. But Colthurst was indisposed to take it very seriously. He had been in tight places of the kind more than once before, and had managed to cut a sufficiently direct road out of them.

For as Colthurst had said of himself, he was not soft. He had very definite ambitions, and woe to the person or thing that should come between those ambitions and their

fulfilment. He would show himself somewhat remorseless. And this not so much from selfishness as from a profound conviction that he possessed unusual powers, and that he was bound to give them an expression as complete and unhampered as might be. It has become the fashion to narrow the meaning of the word conscience, and limit its operations to the sphere of practical morality, to the fatal cheapening of all literary and artistic labour. Some excellent persons, indeed, have run a trifle mad on this subject; and have offered the world as a great and precious truth the palpably great confusion, that a good man and a good workman are synonymous. While some others, going even a step further, have added the even more pernicious fallacy that a bad man and a bad workman are equally so. Unhappily things do not move on such simple lines. It would no doubt be infinitely more convenient if they did. Whether James Colthurst was morally conscientious or not the reader is free to decide for himself if patience carries him to the final pages of this little history. But that his artistic conscientiousness was of a rare and noble order I can very confidently affirm. And it was precisely the working of this artistic conscience which made him, as he sat on the sea-wall, the sleeping village above and the sleepless sea below, realize one thing clearly, namely, that in the present state of his fortunes he could not indulge in the expensive luxury of a wife.

As to Jenny's share in the matter, the young man had

no great faith in broken hearts. The girl's ardour would cool perceptibly, he fancied, when he had been absent a few weeks. When the excitement of his presence, the excitement of standing for him, of embodying, as she did with such remarkable dramatic instinct, the attitudes and expression demanded by the subjects of the pictures he had in hand—when this was over, all would be over, he thought, as far as he was concerned.

Colthurst leaned his hand on the top of the wall, and turning half-round, restlessly, looked out to sea. A month or two hence she would probably make it up with her old lover again. Colthurst tried to be cynically amused at the idea. But, in truth, he was not very much amused at it. Like most other persons, he would have preferred both eating his cake and keeping it; have preferred that Jenny should be faithful and yet he remain quite free. The emotional side of his nature had a word to say at this juncture. But he did his best to silence it with a little cheap philosophy. After all there were many Jennys, and more charming women far than poor, half-educated Jenny to be met with up and down the ways of life. He must look to the future to redress the limited indulgences of the present. When he had climbed the tree of fame, he promised himself a generous meal of the peculiarly delicious apples that are reported to ripen on its topmost branches.

Unfortunately, as the majority have discovered in every

age, the tree of fame is an inconveniently tall tree; the trunk of it is abominably smooth, too, affording very little foothold to the climber. With all due respect to the young man's talent, it must be owned that his canvasses were not at a premium. And so it happened, that before long, his thoughts wandered away from Jenny Parris, and even from her possible restoration to the arms of Stephen Kingdon, to dwell on certain unsold pictures, and on the unpardonable density of dealers who had refused, commercially speaking, to have anything to say to them. The said dealers, however, were ready enough with their tongues in the direction of advice—advice as to the high desirability of a radical change in Mr. Colthurst's style and choice of subject.

But Colthurst, as he gazed away to the herring-boats drifting, tiny black specks, far out in the bay, swore to himself he would never change. He would starve rather. He built his work on sure foundations, on certain deep convictions, and to change would be to prostitute his talent. That which he believed, he must speak; that—simply, fearlessly, regardless of unpopularity, regardless of contemptuous or even offensive criticism.

To the presentment of the immediate and actual, as he saw it to-day, Colthurst had dedicated his powers. Perhaps this was in part a revulsion from the narrow Calvinistic creed of his youth,—its rather blasphemous notion that this world would be such a very much more satisfactory one if it had occurred to the Creator to leave at

least half of it out; its fierce refusal to accept the artistic and intellectual inheritance bequeathed to us by centuries of human imagination and labour; its sullen placing of things lovely, lively, agreeable to the senses or wit, within the dreary categories of sin. In his revulsion from all this Colthurst undoubtedly risked losing his sense of proportion and relative value, and becoming an intellectual and moral universalist of a very advanced type.

'There was never any more inception than there is now—
Nor any more youth or age than there is now;
There will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.'

These four lines pretty completely summed up the young man's creed at this period. He had come across them a few months back; and in reading them had felt that sudden turn in the blood which, in persons of sensitive organisation, so often accompanies a movement of keen intellectual satisfaction. They appeared to him illuminating in a remarkable degree. He subscribed to them as to some Declaration of Independence and act of emancipation, setting his soul free from all bogeyisms and superstitions, and giving him courage to look the world, as he found it, in the face, with sane, untroubled eyes. They gave the lie to the blighting eschatology that had been the bugbear of his youth. They presented him, to put it rather floridly, with a blank cheque on the universe, assuring him at the same time of the solvency of that magni-

ficent concern and its entire ability to meet any drafts he might elect to make on it. He repeated the lines to himself now, as he watched the herring-boats, and found in them a source of strong encouragement.

All the light left still hung in the west—a glistening whiteness lying over sea and sky, merging the confines of the one into the other, so that no horizon was perceptible. Owing to the projection of the headland just beyond, the road, the quay, the lime-kilns and the beach below were in deep shadow. Impenetrable obscurity was upon them, veiling and massing into one expanse of flat darkness the forms of all alike. The result of this distribution of light and shade was an optical illusion, which affected Colthurst's imagination forcibly as soon as he perceived it. For it seemed as though the blackness around and below him was the limit of solid things, as though he was sitting on the extreme verge and looking down over the sheer gigantic walls of the earth as she rolled on through the pale immensity of space.

It was very characteristic of Colthurst's complex temperament that just when he had found stern comfort in the doctrine of immutability—the stability and continuity of phenomena as reason and observation present them to our consciousness—his senses should play this rather grisly trick upon him. He leaned on both hands and gazed into the deep gloom and vast colourless beyond, with a sort of giddy fascination. The little boats might

be worlds, too, spinning millions of miles below in the great void. As for the hoarse murmur of the ground-swell, it seemed the voice of enormous air-waves, lapping for ever against the sides of the planet as she sailed that impalpable, shoreless sea.—The whole scene and the effect it produced on him reminded Colthurst of certain terrible impressions of childhood, born of illness and nervous excitability, and in particular of a recurrent dream which for a series of weeks had made night hideous to him. Now, after the lapse of years, the memory of that same dream produced in him strange sensations of mingled awe and attraction. Looking down into the darkness he was aware of an insane longing to drop over the wall and—well,—see what would happen next.

Colthurst distrusted such queer moods when they took possession of him. They alarmed him slightly. He wondered to what they pointed. Nothing was more disagreeable to him than the suspicion they suggested that his brain at moments was not quite steady. In the present case to convince himself beyond question that the world was round after all, and that dropping over the sea-wall would not lead to any interesting excursion through space, but merely to a congeries of painful compound fractures, if not to that permanent and final dislocation of the physical being, commonly known as death—he picked up a stone off the roadway and threw it over into the blackness, listening, as he did so, to hear it strike

the ground below with a degree of anxiety which he felt to be absurdly weak-minded.

He waited some seconds, but the stone apparently had not reached the ground. It made no sound. It had, in point of fact, alighted on a heap of wet sand piled up against the side of the lime-kiln. The silence was very distressing to Colthurst. Was the stone falling, falling, still falling, falling everlastingly into the infinite abyss?

Hastily stooping down, he groped with both hands in the roadway again. Found another stone, a large one, raised it with an effort, pitched it over the wall, and listened once more.

This time the stone conducted itself in a reassuringly normal manner. It struck one of the buttresses of masonry with a clang, and then bounding outward, rolled down the beach and into the quay pool with a rattle and splash.

The young man drew himself up quickly, an involuntary exclamation of relief on his lips. His forehead was damp, his heart was thumping against his ribs in a way that made his breath come quite short. Colthurst was ashamed of his agitation. It annoyed him acutely.

'That handsome witch has contrived to turn my head to some purpose to-night,' he said to himself, rather savagely.

Then he moved away with rapid, noiseless footsteps up the road towards the quiet village again. As he did so, a light in the upper window of the last of the old, cob

cottages at the edge of the cliff caught his eye. Colthurst was feeling unpleasantly nervous, shaken, and consequently ill-tempered. He stopped a moment.

'Ah, Jenny,' he said, half aloud, 'I am not very grateful to you, after all, for the gift of your heart. You have landed both yourself and me in a deuced awkward position. It won't do. And the sooner I get out of it the better.'

He turned and looked back once more at that ghostly pallor in the west.

'Whatever I may fling myself over walls, or tumble into bottomless pits of nothingness and go to the devil generally for, I can't afford to do it for you,' he added, 'splendid though you are in your way, Jenny Parris.'

Chapter V.

We have just seen how James Colthurst, claiming the free exercise of his individual rights of man, speedily began trying to extricate himself from the difficulty in which his contributory negligence—to use no stronger term—had gone far to place him. Jenny Parris' state of mind is worth passing attention also. For it is universally admitted that to arrive at even an approximately just view of any affair it is necessary to call witnesses on both sides, since looks, words, and even actions, have a tiresome habit of lending themselves to almost diametrically opposite

interpretations. In one sense, indeed, far from being stubborn, nothing is more elastic than fact. It can, as testimony, be stretched any and every way. And its elasticity is likely, alas ! to be tested to the uttermost when the interpreters of it are on one side a man, and on the other a maid.

Jenny Parris, then, according to the manner of the majority of her sex, believing vehemently that which she wished to believe, had gone home to the last of the rickety cottages perched on the cliff, her heart overflowing with joy. Notwithstanding her unruly temper, the girl's disposition was buoyant, hopeful, and loyal. Hers was one of those large, generous natures, which, with an almost unlimited capacity for running their poor heads against stone walls to the great inconvenience of themselves and others, have still an heroic element in them.

Jenny's expression was at once tender and triumphant, as she swung up the rough flight of steps leading out of the Square. Her love was returned, her vanity satisfied, her wounded pride appeased. She had an agreeable sense that her mouth, like the pious woman, Hannah's, of old, was enlarged over her enemies—that rather too consciously virtuous person, her aunt Sarah Jane Kingdon, at their head. She had accepted unquestioningly Colthurst's faith in his own powers; and vague, but delightful visions of future grandeur, when he should be rich and famous, floated through her brain. She had told him the truth

when she declared herself willing to follow him barefoot; but during their walk from the gate up in the combe to the first cottages in the street, the young man's talk had—as he subsequently feared—given her every reason to believe that her devotion was not in the least likely to be put to proof of that kind. And so, naturally enough, Jenny's thoughts turned in the direction of self-glorification. Fancy travels fast under such conditions. When the girl reached the doorway of the cottage and paused a moment on the threshold, unwilling to exchange the freedom and freshness of the evening outside, for the close atmosphere of the kitchen within, she was occupied with vivid pictures of occasional returns to Beera in the future—Beera, humble, teachable, attentive—Beera, round-eyed with wonder at the brilliant fortunes of its once rather despised daughter.

At the further end of the kitchen, a long room, low and narrow as the cabin of a vessel, his face towards the door, sat William Parris studying his open Bible. The aspect of the kitchen was not inviting. The fire had gone out, leaving the cooking-stove and the cavernous chimney-place a blot of blackness in the wall on the right, before which in resigned discomfort crouched an old sandy and white cat. Just inside the door on the stone floor lay a great pile of brown and yellow herring-nets, emitting a quite sufficiently perceptible odour of stale fish. The rafters were browned by smoke, and the walls patched with half a

dozen different patterns of paper in varying stages of griminess.

These sombre surroundings were a not inappropriate setting to the figure bending over the Bible. Parris was a tall, powerfully-built man, full-lipped like his daughter, but with fairer hair and bluer eyes than hers. If Jenny had any Spanish blood in her veins it must have come from her mother's side of the family.—His curly, grizzled beard, growing high on the cheek, was short and close, showing the line of his jaw. His bullet-shaped head was well set on a hairy, muscular neck, and his features were well distributed. In short, he would have been an unusually handsome man but for a long seamy scar running down from the outer curve of the left eye-socket to the corner of the mouth, that drew the lip up and back, exposing the canine tooth under the edge of his short moustache. This disfigurement, which gave an unpleasant, snarling look to the otherwise fine face, along with a certain disregard of soap and water (against which his daughter protested in vain), made William Parris in his soiled canvas trousers and old blue jersey a figure, picturesque perhaps, but otherwise doubtfully agreeable.

He was not a very good scholar. And now, as he sat reading, he followed the words diligently across the page with one blunt forefinger, while with the other hand he shaded the dip candle set in a broken china candlestick on the table before him, so as to concentrate all the feeble

light on his book. But probably the very difficulty he experienced in deciphering the contents of the book only stamped its sonorous language more indelibly on his memory.

Bill Parris' system of exegesis was very simple. He drew no distinction between history and parable, between statement of events and symbolic utterance. All to him alike was the Word of the Lord, mystic, sacred, life-giving. No miracle staggered his faith by its improbability, no story of revenge or ruthless war of extermination troubled his moral sense by its brutality. His moral and spiritual digestion, indeed, was not easily deranged. So his mind came to be saturated with Old Testament sentiment—Parris distinctly preferred the revelation of Sinai to that of Calvary—and packed with Old Testament phrases, which in moments of excitement he would pour forth, not without a kind of rude eloquence, in a stream of wild improvisation.

This gift of prophesying was greatly admired by his hearers in the rough-cast little Salems, Bethels, or Providences of Brattleworthy, Codd's Camp, and Nettlecombe. It was popularly reported of him that 'Bill Parris held on to the Lord in prayer most amazin'.' The very incomprehensibility and disjointedness of his discourses were regarded as sure proof of their supernatural origin. Scoffers, as we know, offer quite another explanation of such religious phenomena, and scoffers were to be found

even in the neighbourhood of Arcadian Beera. Kent Crookenden, for instance, had taken a lamentably carnal, Gallio-like view of the matter, when old Mr. Hawley, troubled by the emptiness of church and fulness of chapel, had consulted him about it. He declared that, though Parris' strong constitution had otherwise resisted the effects of drink, his brain had not escaped injury, and that he was in the first stage of that common enough form of religious mania, in which seeing visions and hearing voices alternates with fits of brooding melancholy.—'Some day he will go mad enough to be shut up, Hawley,' he had said; 'and then Little Salem will be shut up too, and all your strayed sheep and lambs will come bleating back to you. Probably they will do so before the inspired lobster-catcher reaches the final dangerous or idiotic stage of mental disintegration. For even pious insanity palls after a time; and the Establishment is pre-eminently sane. Don't be afraid. It's a safe fold. Your people will be bored before long, and then they'll hurry home to it.'

To-night it happened that Parris was in a state of exaltation. The spirit of prophecy was upon him. He had been muttering to himself for the last half-hour. Now as Jenny paused in the open doorway, reluctant to exchange her fair dreams for the somewhat repulsive realities of the cottage kitchen, he raised his head, let the hand with which he had shaded the candle fall heavily upon the table, and began to speak.

'Woe to the fulish virgins,' he cried; 'woe to the rebellious daughters. For they assemble of mun together. They go up along through the streets of the city wi' singin', callin' on to one another—Let us put on our gudely apparel, let us go forth wi' laughter, to the sound o' the tabret an' harp. Let us go up to our high plaices, to the groves an' plaices o' the hill altars wi' feastin', yea, let us feast under the cedar trees, even the gudely cedars o' Libanus.'

Sometimes these outpourings alarmed Jenny. For though she criticised her father with greater freedom than filial piety, she could not entirely shake off a half belief in his inspiration. More often they simply angered her. But to-night, full of her own thoughts, the girl paid little heed to his speech. Reflecting that when the fit was on him it was useless to hope for any rational reply to a question, Jenny remained standing in the doorway till the storm of words should be stilled. She stooped down, now and again, to caress the old sandy and white cat that had hopped across to greet her and was now rubbing against her ankles, purring hoarsely. The poor beast had been caught in a steel trap in the woods and had lost a fore-paw, so its movements were necessarily lop-sided and ungainly. But Jenny, who was always touched by the sight of suffering, only cherished it the more tenderly for its misfortune.

Whether the girl's indifferent attitude annoyed Parris,

or whether he had reached the point of exaltation where the mind ceases to be affected by anything outside itself, I cannot say. He may have been prompted by half-conscious malice, or the turn his words took may have been purely accidental. The psychological phenomena presented by persons in his condition defy strict analysis. But after staring at Jenny for a few moments, he spoke again, his voice rising in tone :—

'Woe to the fulish virgins, I say woe, woe unto mun, for the day o' their tribulation cometh—'e be nigh, yea, 'e shall not tarry. Then shall they cry, but no man shall answer. The ears o' heaven shall be shet against the cryin' of mun. For gudely apparel they mun have filthy rags; for the sound of the tabret and melody mournin' and mighty weepin'. The wine o' their feasts shall be spelled. Yea, it shall run down and the ground shall leck it up, the airth shall open her mouth wide an' swallow it. Destruction shall overtake mun. Then shall they rise up and cry airly in the mornin', and to the goin' down o' the sun shall they continue, because o' the inequity o' their doin's——'

Parris paused, opened his wild, blue eyes wide, fixing them on his daughter, and spread out his large hands as in repudiation. His voice rose almost to a cry.—'But no man shall be found to petty mun,' he said, 'nor to zuccour their fatherless children.'

His action, his last words, startled Jenny into sudden

attention. The girl was still a good deal moved and excited. And they seemed to cut across her bright dreams as a scythe cuts through standing grass and flowers, laying them low in an instant.

'Father, father, what be tellin' about?' she cried out, hurriedly.

Parris gazed at her vaguely again. Then his face broke in a smile, that was painfully distorted by the dragging back of the upper lip. His whole manner, even his accent, changed.

'Who be you?' he asked, with an air of childish curiosity. 'Where do 'e come from?'

'Why, father, are you mazed?' the girl answered. 'Don't you know me? It's me—Jenny. I've been along of Dave and a lot more of 'em picnicking over to Red Rock. Don't you mind it's my birthday?'

'Go along with you! you b'ain't Jenny, though you're a likely maid enough,' he rejoined, with the same snarling smile. 'She's gone up over-stairs to bed wi' her mammy an hour an' more agone.'

He half rose from his chair, straining his eyes as though to see something at a distance, leaning forward and turning out his elbows as he gripped the edge of the table with both hands.—'You'm not alone,' he called out, sharply. 'There be tu of 'e. Who's the man a-looking over your shoulder?'

Jenny wheeled round, catching hold of the jamb of the

door to steady herself. Her father's expression and manner scared her, following immediately on his strange speech. Wheeled round with a quick, throbbing hope of finding Colthurst beside her, with a passionate longing, not only for the joy and protection of his presence, but also that he might have come to claim her, here in her own poor home, and by a public avowal of his love set her sudden fears at rest.

Alas! not James Colthurst, but only her brother, David, was there behind her. Unmistakeable though his face was in shadow—for, as he half-sat, half-leaned on the palings on the other side of the little paved yard before the cottage, the upper part of his figure was silhouetted against that weird whiteness hanging in the western sky.

'Ask him if he's going out to-night, Jenny,' the young sailor said, softly, nodding towards the open cottage door.

Poor Jenny suffered a pang of bitter disappointment.

'Come and ask him yourself,' she returned. 'I can't make no sense of him. He's been sittin' there tellin' a lot o' silly nonsense like he was clean out of his head.'

'No, no, you ask him, Jenny,' David repeated. He spoke slowly, and there was a thickness in his utterance. 'I see Robbie Ching go down to Quay just now. He's right under against the lime-kiln, and I'll holler on to him to help put the boat out while I shift my clothes if father'll go. Ask him, there's a good maid.'

Jenny hesitated. She was excited, even nervous. For

the first time it occurred to her seriously to doubt her father's sanity. And in her present frame of mind she hated the gloomy little kitchen, its smoke-grimed rafters. Then tossing back her head defiantly, and pushing the herring-nets aside impatiently with her foot, she crossed the threshold and went up to the near end of the table.

'Dave wants to know if you'm going out to-night,' she said. 'Most of the boats are out already.'

But Parris had sunk down in his chair again, and the forefinger of his right hand had set off on its slow journey across the page of the Bible.—'The Lord has cast mun out and put mun far from Him. He'll set the feet of mun in slippery plaices, so that they'm bound to stumble an' fall. Fall, fall, fall,' he repeated, smiling to himself with not precisely apostolic charity. ''Tis written there be fu' that be saved—a blessed Gospel, for I be one o' they fu', praise the Lord!'

Jenny threw up her hands with a gesture of painful helplessness. From the domestic point of view the possession of a private prophet is a doubtful joy, perhaps.

'Father, father, let go your preachin' and wake up,' she cried.

Either the cloud lifted, or Parris elected to descend out of the clouds to the level of ordinary business. Five minutes later he staggered out of the cottage with the great pile of herring-nets across his shoulders.

Then, and not till then, David having performed the opera-

tion described as 'hollering on to Robbie Ching,' came indoors; and going into the little, dark, back kitchen proceeded to exchange his smart yachtsman's suit for the miscellaneous garments suited to a long night of shooting and hauling herring-nets, and drifting on the wide, unquiet bosom of the bay.

Jenny paid little enough attention to the black-headed, flannel-shirted young fellow, as he struggled into a much-darned jersey; and, coming back into the kitchen, sat down beside the empty fireplace and began dragging on a great pair of sea boots, reaching half-way up the thigh. She sat with her elbows on the table, resting her head in her hands, pushing her fingers up among the masses of her dark hair. She was very unhappy. Her fair visions seemed to have fled, vanished, melted before the stern touch of familiar reality—her father, crazy, as she began to think him; his strange talk, with all its sinister suggestions; the ugly, almost squalid home, and its atmosphere, a sickening one to her just now, of poverty and toil. Jenny was, unfortunately for herself, by no means philosophic. Her power of striking an average was limited. She clung in passionate insistence to the thought of Colthurst and his promises; but both he and they seemed cruelly remote and unsubstantial just now. The girl's present unreasoning depression was proportionate to her late unreasoning gladness. Hers was an excessive nature, disorderly in the violence both of its sorrow and its joy.

'Come, Jenny,' David said, presently, bending low and

tugging at one of his boots;—his heel had stuck in the hard creases of leather just above the ankle, and it refused stubbornly to go on.—'Hurry up and get the lantern, and the can, and a bit of victual together. We'm so late as never was, already.'

The girl raised her head unwillingly. As she did so, she caught sight, for the first time, of her brother's face.

'Dear heart alive, Dave,' she exclaimed, 'you'm bleeding! Whatever have you done to yourself? You've never been fightin'.'

'Yes, that's exactly what I have been doing,' he answered, coolly. 'And that's why I wouldn't come in. I didn't want father to get askin' questions.'

Jenny looked at him in amazement. Good, steady-going, well-conducted Dave! What was coming next?

'Whatever——' she began. But the young man forestalled her inquiry.

'I may as well tell you about it now, I reckon,' he said. 'All the town'll be ringing with it before morning. And you'd best keep out of Aunt Sarah Jane's way for a bit, for I've been and spoilt Steve's bu-ty for him for the next week.'—Notwithstanding his wounded condition and the awkward stiffness about his mouth, David could not repress a chuckle.—'She set up a 'scritchin' like an old hen having her neck wrung when she saw him come in, he went on. 'She swears she'll have me up afore the magistrates at Yeomouth, though I am own brother's son

to her. But I expect Steve won't let her make a silly of herself like that. An' if she does, Parson Crookenden 'll get me off somehow.'

'Whatever did you get fighting Steve for?'

The young man rose and stamped his foot down into the boot.

'To let him know he'd best pick his words a bit when he gets talking about you, Jenny,' he said.

The hot colour rushed into the girl's cheeks, and her eyes blazed.

'And what's he got to say about me?' she demanded.

'Well, he seems to have a good deal more to say than I exactly cared to hear. He was publishin' some fool's tale about what he'd seen, comin' home from Red Rock, of you and Mr. Colthurst sweetheartin'.'

'If he says he seen any harm, he lies,' Jenny burst out, stormily.

'So I told mum,' Dave answered, busy over his boot once more. 'And to prove it I up and knocked the lies down his throat again.—Get the things quick, like a good maid. I must go.'

As the young sailor turned out of the cottage into the still autumn night Jenny came close to him and laid her hand on his shoulder. They were a fine couple, the brother and sister, he in his rough, half-savage fishing clothes, she in her scanty grey gown, standing together in the dusk.

'Dave, you'll not let him talk,' she said, with a sort of

gentle eagerness. 'You'll stand by me. It's all right between me and Mr. Colthurst. You believe me, Dave, don't you? I tell you it's all right.'

There was a just perceptible pause before he replied, 'It had better be all right, or Mr. Colthurst 'll have to answer for it, gentleman or no gentleman. But I wish you could have fancied one of your own people, Jenny. Beera folk's best. I don't hold with furriners and furrin ways. I hoped maybe you'd take up with Steve again presently when he's mended up a bit, and hasn't got quite so many different colours about his eyes.'

David chuckled once more at the agreeable thought of the highly decorative countenance his cousin would present to society at large on the morrow.—'He'll be a sight and no mistake,' he added, with cheerful conviction. 'Take care of yourself, Jenny.'

And with that he stumbled away over the cobble stones, and down the steep flight of steps as fast as his big boots would allow.

Jenny's sleep was generally profound enough, notwithstanding the heat in summer and cold in winter of her little room close up under the thatch. The raftered ceiling of it sloped away so sharply that it was only in the centre, under the ridge beam of the gable, that she could stand quite upright. To get the big four-post bed, which formed its chief adornment, into the room at all, it had been necessary to remove the tester bodily. So that the posts, sawn

off at half their height, stood up in purposeless, unsightly fashion at the four corners. But neither the poverty of her surroundings, nor the fact that the hardness of the wooden slats of the bedstead was but indifferently disguised by a straw palliasse and very meagre feather bed, usually interfered much with the sweetness of her slumbers.

To-night I suppose, however, she was overtired with her walk, the day's not wholly successful pleasuring and its very varying emotions. For it was not till some time after Colthurst had ended his lonely vigil down on the sea-wall that she could make up her mind to put out the candle. And when at last she did sleep, her sleep was an uneasy one. She turned restlessly from side to side, much to the discomfort of the old sandy cat, curled up on the patchwork quilt against her feet. More than once she started and flung her shapely arms wide across the poor pillow, and moaned as though in pain.—For all the sounds and sights, the events and imaginings of the last twelve hours came back to her, jumbled together in a phantasmagoria of disconnected yet vivid impressions.—Again, with a sort of ecstasy, she felt Colthurst's kisses on her lips and his arms round her. Again she heard her father's voice rising in stern warning and bitter denunciation. Again she heard the mocking laughter of the owl. Again she saw little Mary Crookenden's pale face and red eyelids, as the child, in her brilliant orange and scarlet frock, stood in the soft sunset light among the gorse and heather,

Jenny heard a shouting too, and saw struggling figures, and then faces—Steve Kingdon's, her brother's, once Colthurst's, and that was worst of all—white, fixed, terrible, and dabbled with blood.

In the grey of the morning the girl got up and opened the small casement window. Above on the uplands the day broke fresh and fair enough. But down here in Beera town all was dim and still as death. The edges of the thatch above, and the straggling rose spray trained up beside the window, were furred with innumerable tiny drops of wet. While in the windless calm, the sea fog, warm, moist and ghostly, crept up stealthily, a formless, stifling greyness, over the little whitewashed village, and into the long tortuous windings of the wooded combe.

I must remind the reader that all this took place in easy-going, old Parson Hawley's time, long before Cyprian Aldham became vicar, and the sun of modern High Anglicanism arose on the benighted West Country parish of Beera Mills.

BOOK II.—MISS MARY CROOKENDEN.

'It is worth the labour to consider well of Love, whether it be a God, or a Devil, or a passion of the mind, or partly God, partly Devil, partly passion.'—PLOTINUS.

CHAPTER I.

ALL the critics were in a flurry. They cackled up and down the columns of the newspapers and pages of the magazines like a pullet who has laid her first egg on a frosty day in December. And, yet in point of fact, none of them had laid an egg; but had only found one,—which, with all deference to the talent of critics and high functions of criticism, is quite another matter.

Still they cackled, and rightly. For it was a new sort of egg, an unexpected egg; and their smartness, and knowledge of the world, and literary gifts, and artistic acumen, notwithstanding, they were really at a loss to determine what kind of living creature might be inside it. One section of them, the younger, more progressive, and daring, declared that it undoubtedly contained an eagle, destined to soar away up into the empyrean in most majestic fashion, till it stared, undismayed and unblinking in the face of the sun himself, carrying the future of the British

art—as the Roc did Sinbad the sailor—aloft on its back. All of which modest little phrases read very well in print, when developed and enlarged on, and interspersed with allusions to Naturalism and Democracy, to 'the lifting of the veil of Isis,' to Maia, and the Modern Idea. Another section, the older and more conservative this one, took, as in duty bound—after reading the lucubrations of their contemporaries—a diametrically opposite view. They asserted that the egg in question was laid by no fowl that ever yet wore feathers, by no bird, whether of prey or innocently domestic; but that its origin was reptilian. In their minds there could be no question about it. They therefore called on respectable persons, in the name of all they held dearest,—prejudice, pocket, wife, child, hearth, country, not to mention the eternal salvation of their own artistic souls—to rally like one man, and leap upon that egg and the horrid possibilities as yet lying hid within it. To trample under foot, and generally murder and demolish it. While a third section, and this the largest—since the wisdom of unbelief commends itself by being a pre-eminently easy and cheap form of wisdom—elected to swear that there was no egg; or that, admitting an egg existed, it was of the sort commonly found in mares' nests, which sort is invariably addled, as every one knows; and that, consequently, it was equally silly and superfluous to make any fuss at all about it. And like most persons who take up a superior position

and entreat others to be calm and not to make a noise, the noise which these preachers of common-sense and moderation made themselves was quite the most persistent of any. For, it is impossible not to notice, that of all cackles over public matters, whether great or small, none is ever so pertinacious and prolonged as the contemptuous and negative cackle.

And, meanwhile, before the source and subject of this hubbub—a picture hung on the line in the large room of the Royal Academy—a crowd had gathered, and shifted, and broken, and passed, only to gather again—had chattered, and stared, and cheerfully pronounced judgment in less than three minutes upon work which had taken the artist months, possibly years, to execute—during six days out of every seven, continuously, through May and June, and on to the hot, moist morning at the close of July, when it is our purpose—after the lapse of ten years of silence—once again to pick up the scattered threads of our history.

But of the picture itself, it is necessary to say a few words first. Under a sky of closely-packed cloud you looked straight down a field-lane, deep in slimy cart-ruts and cattle tracks brimming with water, to a space of dim moorland. This dipped towards a black peat bog in the hollow; while the rise on the right was crowned by a little, huddled, grey homestead, the rafters of its dismantled barn showing skeleton-like against the sky. Across the

bog, the gorse and sedges were burning, smouldering sullenly, sending up pale jets of smoke, which, as the wind caught and beat them down again, trailed away over the rusty face of the moor in long lines. The whole was backed, save where the farm-buildings rose against the horizon, by a purple-brown gloom of low-lying winter woods.

On either side the lane were crumbling earth banks, riddled in places by cavernous rabbit burrows. One was topped by a straggling hedge of oak and beech, to the lower twigs of which the leaves still clung thickly—the faded reds and browns of them being reflected in the shuddering surface of the muddy pools below. Opening on to this uninviting roadway a dilapidated five-barred gate, the spars of it splintered and broken, the rickety posts bleached by lichens and rot; and leaning on the top bar of it, his back towards you, a tall, high-shouldered man.

The painter had certainly not been guilty of any weak concession to the popular demand for what is superficially pleasant, graceful, picturesque. For the man's figure was, both in costume and attitude, uncompromisingly probable, in a sense common-place. He wore a rough check shooting-coat that had seen a good deal of service. The pockets of it bulged. It hung loose and wrinkled below the shoulders as the wearer leaned his elbows on the gate. Of his face nothing was visible save the line of a low brow, of a deep-cut eye socket, high cheek-bone and

heavy jaw, under a shock of reddish-brown hair. The presentment was simple enough. But there was a certain energy, almost fierceness in it. The man was strong, still you knew from the slouch of the whole figure he was tired. He leaned heavily. He was absorbed, too; absolutely indifferent to effect. You found yourself wishing he would turn round. For you wanted to know more—to learn the secret, the purpose, to read the past and forecast the future of that averted face.

On the other side of the gate, some dozen paces down the lane, stood another figure. That of a young woman. She had paused; suddenly, as it appeared, turned round, looked back. She held herself perfectly erect, her head thrown up, her lips parted in laughter. Her left hand was raised pushing back the loose coils of hair which spread, a dark cloud, above the rounded sweep of cheek and chin. The other was extended as in invitation; while the wind, taking the skirt of her simple, grey-winsey dress and blowing it closely against her, revealed the fine curves of her form from waist to knee and knee to ankle. —An ideal woman of the people, primitive, vigorous, deep-chested, well-set on her feet, nothing feeble nor *mesquine* about her; fitted to be the mother of healthy, handsome, firm-limbed children.

Backed by that desolate landscape, balanced by the somewhat sinister presence of her companion, the rich, youthful gladness and promise of her personality seemed

to show out as radiantly as the living reds of lip and cheek showed out from the sombre tones of cloud and moorland, from the mournful vagueness of the trailing smoke, and the glistering pallor of the foul lane. Yet looking closer, you perceived, for all her laughter, the woman was not wholly glad. Anxious in the midst of its gaiety, a strange force of appeal in the grey eyes, her countenance was a triumph of conflicting emotions,—its hopefulness weighted by an almost desperate question, its happiness shadowed by an almost tragic doubt,—as she turned with that motion of invitation to the man behind her, and looked him full, daringly, fearingly, in the face.

The name of the picture was hackneyed. It made no attempt at originality. Possibly the painter had learnt the useful lesson that *les vérités bêtes* are, after all, *les vérités vraies;* and consequently had considered it superfluous to exercise his wits in the production of a new and startling title. He had christened his work 'The Road to Ruin' without apology or explanation, and left the public to take exception at the familiar phrase if it pleased. Though, judging by the interest it was now exciting, his muddy field-lane seemed likely to prove, in his own case, no pathway of disaster, but rather—conservative or sceptical tempered critics notwithstanding—the highway to a great and notable success.

Chapter II.

It was still early and the galleries were still fairly empty, when Cyprian Aldham entered the large room on the July morning in question; and paused, catalogue in hand, looking about him with that fine flavour of reserve, of slight superiority, in his bearing and expression, which his friends commended as so well-bred, and those whom he did not honour with his friendship sometimes condemned as so impertinent.

The fact that he was vicar of a remote West Country parish—that of Beera Mills—appeared to Mr. Aldham no sufficient reason for being out of touch with the affairs of the day. On the contrary, he rather plumed himself upon maintaining a close acquaintance with 'all that is going on,' as the phrase runs. He had not any intention of being left behind in respect of social or artistic, any more than in respect of religious developments. It would have appeared to him highly unsuitable that he should be left behind. For this young clergyman, though a charming and graceful person, was possessed of a very strong sense of all that was due to Cyprian Aldham both from the world at large and from Cyprian Aldham himself. He took himself quite seriously. Perhaps he never quite forgot that his cousin Sir Reginald Aldham being childless, he stood next in succession to that gentleman's baronetcy and delightful place in Midlandshire. Not that he was, for a

moment, inclined to dilate on his prospective good fortune, or inform any one about it who might be reprehensibly ignorant of it already. To do so would have seemed to him contemptibly undignified. For the proudest pride of all is unquestionably that which takes its own grandeurs so absolutely for granted, that it holds it is altogether superfluous to call the attention of others to the fact of their existence.

I have described the young man as graceful. Some enthusiastic souls were disposed to go much further, and pronounce him a miracle of refined good looks. As a boy, indeed, before his features had hardened and the bone of his face become so marked, with his golden-brown hair standing out like the aureole of some transfigured saint, Cyprian's appearance had been exquisitely, almost absurdly, angelic. His hair was reduced to less celestial proportions now; while the beauty of his mouth was marred by an habitual compression of the lips, as of one upon whom the order of things wherein he is compelled to exist continually inflicts small shocks of disgust.

Mr. Aldham affected a slight negligence in dress, wearing the inevitable broad-brimmed felt hat and clerical coat until the original black of them had grown greenish from long service. On the other hand, his linen was of the finest and whitest. He eschewed meat, eating only eggs or salt fish on a Friday. But the table-cloth must be spotless under the delicate china on which they were

served; while a wide-eyed, wondering Madonna of the modern pre-Raphaelite school gazed down from the wall at the sparely furnished table. All of which may sound over fastidious, finicking almost. Yet no one coming personally in contact with Mr. Aldham would have ventured to apply the latter term to him, I think. For the young man's delicate nature had an edge to it, and that a finely tempered one. It could cut.

On the present occasion, as he paused surveying the gallery, his manner suddenly suffered a change. His light blue eyes lost their vaguely supercilious expression. A certain eagerness seemed to push up through his reserve.

For just opposite, in the crowd gathered before the popular picture, he perceived a familiar figure—a young man like Saul the son of Kish, a head and shoulders above his fellows. Lancelot Crookenden's height, and make, the large serenity of his back, were quite unmistakable. But Aldham was intimately acquainted with this young gentleman's tastes; for had he not, now about five years ago, at the earnest request of the boy's guardian and his mother, turned 'bear-leader,' and gone round the world with him, in the interval which elapsed between his leaving Eton and going up to Cambridge? Lancelot had got into no scrapes. Had caused very little anxiety or trouble; save on the fine summer's morning when he had walked off by himself from the hotel, and amused himself by swimming the Niagara river just below the rapids,

thereby giving his tutor-companion a very evil quarter of an hour. Through high and low latitudes alike, the boy had passed carrying his own sweet-tempered, unvexed and not superabundantly intelligent, British atmosphere along with him. He had regarded India as an awfully jolly place where you shot tigers, and stuck pigs, and played polo; and Canada as an even jollier place, because it wasn't so fearfully hot, you know, where you had unlimited sleighing and skating, and where you could tramp any number of miles on snow-shoes after problematical big game. Had looked at all mountains principally with a view to climbing them; at rivers with a view to fishing them; at plains with a view to riding across them; at forests with a view to hunting something in them; at cities, however architecturally magnificent or historically interesting, principally with a view to leaving them; at society, tempted all the world over to smile graciously upon so rich and kindly and well-favoured a youth, with a view, civilly but decidedly, to avoiding it as much as possible.

Cyprian had really grown very fond of the boy; but it was impossible to pretend that the note of culture was conspicuous in him. And it was, therefore, not without a movement of considerable curiosity that he crossed the room and addressed him now.

'This is surprising,' he said. 'You are one of the last persons I should have thought to find diligently studying pictures at half-past ten in the morning.'

'Oh! I say, Aldham, how awfully fortunate to run across you like this. I didn't know you'd come up yet. My mother was calling in Lancaster Gate the other day, and Lady Aldham told her you were coming for a night or two on your way through to Paris.'

Lancelot backed out of the crowd as he spoke, and stood in the vacant space before a large leather-covered settee. He beamed. There was really something very engaging about this young giant of four and twenty with the smooth sunburnt face, and quiet, candid eyes and brow. He had an admiration amounting almost to reverence for his former travelling-companion; and he made no attempt to disguise it. Lancelot was quite unaffected, undiplomatic, foolishly sincere.

'It's awfully fortunate,' he repeated—'I mean meeting you like this. And how's the dear old West Country looking?'

'The dear old West Country is looking extremely like an immense green sponge,' Aldham answered, smiling in his cool, thin way.

The cordiality of the young man's greeting pleased him. Not only did it minister to his little conceit of himself; but it tended to relieve his mind of a certain uncomfortable suspicion which had proved somewhat troublesome to him during the last few months.

'The rain has been incessant. My books were becoming mouldy. I was becoming rheumatic, so I hastened

my journey by a few days. Moreover I wished to see the exhibitions before they closed. You are not here by yourself?' he added, after a moment's pause.

'Yes, I am,' Lancelot replied.

Mr. Aldham's sense of pleasure was intensified. He even went so far as to be slightly annoyed with himself for having ever entertained the suspicion which had troubled him. He told himself he had always really known that suspicion to be absurd.

'What has brought you here all alone?' he asked, smiling again. 'Surely this is quite a new departure on your part. I thought you eschewed all artistic shows; and had an uncivilized disposition to resolve pictures into their original elements—so many yards of canvas, so many shillingsworth of pigments, oil, turpentine, and other unsavourinesses.'

Lancelot waited before answering—he was usually somewhat slow of speech—gazing down, meanwhile, at a long perspective of trouser, ending in white spatts, and the toes of a very neat pair of boots from Peels'.

'Well, I don't care very much about pictures,' he said, at last. 'And that's just the bother, you know. Other people do care for them, and I suppose I don't like to find myself out of it.'

'And so you are trying to find your way into it, so to speak, by means of a solitary tour of inspection this morning. That is a practical way of meeting a diffi-

culty. Does the attempt seem likely to prove successful?'

The young man shook his head gently in reply.—'I'm afraid I'm awfully dense, do you know, Aldham,' he said. 'I've never troubled myself much about pictures and things of that kind before, you see. They never seemed to matter much. But lately I've seemed to see it all in a different light. I—well, I'm afraid I'm a dolt.'

Lancelot contemplated his immaculate spatts once more. —'It's an awful nuisance,' he said quietly; and there was a singular ring of emotion in his voice.

To Cyprian Aldham this outburst of confidence, this confession of ineptitude and inadequacy on the part of so conspicuously well-to-do a person appeared both amusing and pathetic. It was refreshingly naif. But it tended to reawaken those suspicions so recently laid to rest. He looked curiously at the goodly youth for a few seconds. He would have been glad to ask him one simple question. He could have put it in a very few words. But, happily, in the interests of patience and good manners, such simple questions are just the most impossible to ask; and Mr. Aldham's manners were above reproach. Therefore, he abstained from asking any question, and merely said, pleasantly yet with, perhaps, a faint flavour of patronage,—'Believe me, you are very far from being a dolt. If you seriously wish to acquaint yourself

with any matter, I do not think want of capacity will stand in your way.'

'Don't you think so?' Lancelot inquired. 'I'm awfully glad of that. I was beginning to be afraid I was only fit for a keeper, or a professional cricketer, or a bruiser, perhaps. Of course it doesn't much matter what I am fit for. There are loads of fellows who've got plenty of brains, and if I'm not among them the loss is mine—that's all. Only somehow it's made me rather low just lately. Of course it doesn't really matter, only it's nice to know you don't think—oh! well, please, Aldham, we won't say any more about it. Look here, come and enlighten me about these pictures. You understand all about them. They say this one's awfully fine—"The Road to Ruin," you know, by that new man everybody's talking about.'

And Lancelot walked resolutely up to the little crowd again, and edged his way in, with a large gentleness that was very irresistible morally as well as physically, till he stood right before the picture.

Aldham followed in his wake, his curiosity by no means lessened, nor his fears allayed by this abrupt ending to the conversation. But once in front of the picture, his thoughts were directed into another channel. He was sensible of receiving a shock of surprise. The sad landscape reminded him forcibly of outlying parts of his own parish of Beera Mills. The westerly wind, keen and salt off the Atlantic, seemed to cry, with impatient rustle,

through those nipped, distorted oaks and beeches, and sweep away drearily over the waste beyond. Aldham was a little short-sighted. He bent forward to examine the two figures in the foreground with a sense of expectation. He almost fancied he should recognise them as acquaintances. He looked at them long and carefully. He was not easily stirred; but the woman's laughing, pleading, fearfully questioning face moved him strangely, although it proved unknown to him.

'Ah! this man Colthurst can paint,' he exclaimed involuntarily, turning to Lancelot.

'Yes, I know. At least, so everybody says.'

'This is fine,' Aldham added; 'very fine, and remarkably unpleasant.'

But the young man was not attending. An idea had suddenly occurred to him.

'I say, doesn't it strike you that lane and the whole place is as like as two peas to the turn down to Slat Moor, on Withacott's farm, you remember, before we had it drained and put up the new gates? "Road to Ruin," I should just think it was, if the fellow expects to get a living out of that land. Poor old Jeffery found it so fast enough; he died owing the best part of ten years' rent. I'm glad to think there's nothing as bad as that on the estate now. You might flush a woodcock down there, eh! Aldham; but there's precious little else you'd get off that bit of country.'

Cyprian paused before answering. He had lately expressed an encouraging opinion as to his former pupil's abilities. But really he began to fear his encouragement had been a trifle premature. The excellent youth must be amazingly innocent or lamentably superficial.

'I am afraid it represents more than a question of farming,' he said.—The crowd had broken and passed for the moment, and the two very dissimilar young men stood alone before the popular picture.—'I am afraid it represents the first act of a drama which no draining of land, putting up of new gates, remission of rents, or other mitigation of agricultural depression will prevent being recurrently played out, as long as there are men and women in this wicked world to play it.'

Lancelot looked hard at the speaker and then at the painting. 'Oh! I see.'—He flushed through all his sunburn.—'I'm glad Polly wouldn't come this morning, after all,' he added in a low voice.

The sharp edge of Mr. Aldham's nature showed itself, just then, in the glance he turned upon the young man beside him. 'Miss Crookenden——' he began. But Lancelot did not, or would not hear him.

'They say it's sold for a cool thousand,' he remarked.

Aldham was annoyed. It had never occurred to him before that this boy would venture to do anything so very like snubbing him. Then, moreover, he began to fear his suspicions were justified, that they were most provokingly

far away from an absurdity. Involuntarily he indulged in one of those rather worldly calculations, which the mind carries through so rapidly, that the conscience has not time to protest against them before they are an accomplished fact. Instinctively he set the sober dignities of Aldham Revel against the Slerracombe property; the long pedigree of the fine, old, Midlandshire family, against the few generations of that of the Bristol merchant. He discounted the advantages of the Combmartin connection by certain by no means aristocratically despicable cousinships on his own mother's side. Finally he weighed his attainments, his scholarship, and knowledge of the world, against the modest acquirements of the handsome, simple, young Dives standing by him. Before conscience could intervene with a comment on the slight unworthiness of this proceeding, the calculation was not only made, but the satisfaction flowing from it was already comforting and appeasing Cyprian Aldham. The sharp edge of his nature was sheathed within the scabbard of his delicate manner again. For no doubt remained in his mind which scale, in this little process of weighing, kicked the beam.

'A thousand? Hardly such a sum as that, I imagine,' he said suavely, in response to Lancelot's last remark. 'Halve it and you will probably be much nearer the mark.' —Aldham turned over the leaves of his catalogue rather absently.—'I am glad to have seen it,' he continued. I,

was curious to arrive at conclusions regarding it for myself, after reading the widely divergent criticisms it has called forth. And I see it is very remarkable. Whether you like the spirit of it or not the picture is undeniably a great one.'

'I suppose it is,' Lancelot rejoined, the flush still remaining on his smooth skin. 'But I don't like it. I tell you what, Aldham, if it means all you say it does, it seems to me most awkwardly like selling a woman's honour. Any fellow who could spend months—I suppose it takes months—in painting such a thing, thinking about it all the while, knowing all he meant by it, and then go and take money for it, must be awfully cold-blooded. I hope I shan't run across this Mr. Colthurst. I shouldn't care to have to shake hands with him.'

By common consent the two men sauntered on, making place for another batch of spectators.

'If it means all that,' Lancelot repeated, 'he must be a blackguard, to my thinking, or a brute.'

Why is it that the virtues of our friends, specially when those friends are our juniors, do not invariably give us unmixed joy? Cyprian Aldham was a high-minded and pure-lived man, he was moreover, by profession, a preacher of righteousness; yet instead of hailing the righteousness of this ardent young moralist enthusiastically, and patting it, in cordial admiration, upon the back, he was irritated by it. It appeared to him rather exces-

sive, out of place. His smile was decidedly chilly and his tone of patronage marked, as he said :—

'Really I cannot admit poor Mr. Colthurst's brutality follows as a matter of course. Yours is a very destructive line of criticism. If it is the true one we should be compelled to rule out some of the finest works of literature and art. But I think you probably hardly realize how much you demand that we should part with in our respect for womanhood in the abstract, Lancelot. This is a question which cannot be settled off-hand and in obedience of personal feeling. Fundamentally your demand may be a noble one. But a free response to it must unquestionably leave us poorer by the loss of much which is not only of high æsthetic interest and value, but of high moral value likewise.'

'I don't pretend to know anything about that,' Lancelot said quietly, standing very large, hot, and stiff, in the middle of the room. 'All I know is if you've ever cared for one woman, it makes you care about what you call womanhood in the abstract too, somehow. A wrong done, or going to be done, to any woman, seems, in a way, like a wrong to her—and—and—well, you want to go and punch the brute's head who's done it—that's all.'

Aldham looked curiously at the young man. He laughed a little, presumably at the grammar which, in the struggle to express his thoughts poor Lancelot had let go so very far astray.

'You take the matter with a really embarrassing degree of seriousness,' he said. 'You are a critic armed with a bludgeon. I am very far from underrating the moral question involved; but I think your chivalry makes you exaggerate the offence of the artist to an unwarrantable extent.'

'Well, I don't like it. I didn't like that other picture, in the first room, you know, by this man Colthurst—"The Evening of Labour." But this settles it. Let's look at something else, please. What awfully queer things people do seem to admire.'

Half an hour later, as they passed the turnstile, and passed down the matted stairs to the entrance, Lancelot referred to the picture again. It appeared to have taken singular hold on his imagination.

'I wish that landscape wasn't so like Slat Moor. Colthurst'—he repeated—'Colthurst, I'm sure I've heard the name somewhere. Not lately, I don't mean. It's in everybody's mouth now. But long ago—and I can't for the life of me remember what I associate it with! I say, Aldham, you'll come back to luncheon, won't you? My mother's always only too delighted to see you, you know.'

Chapter III.

Mr. Aldham accepted the invitation to luncheon. As to food, it was an admirable luncheon. But our young clergyman was laudably indifferent to what are euphemistically known as the pleasures of the table. And otherwise the luncheon was a distinctly dull one. Passing years had not lessened Mrs. Crookenden's tribal egotism, weakened her little prejudices, or increased her limited gift of sympathy. Her two daughters, Adela and Carrie, who had now exchanged the schoolroom and brown holland frocks for a well-grown and buxom young womanhood, were not distinguished for sustained power or variety of topics in conversation. They were estimable girls, but both their minds and bodies moved slowly. They had excellent digestions. They were very industrious. They did an immense amount of needlework. They subscribed to a couple of well-known circulating libraries, and read an immense number of books. By the needlework the poor of Slerracombe and of a certain London parish did profit appreciably. By the books they did not themselves, however, profit in any appreciable degree. They never skipped. They read each and every book through from beginning to end. Then, and then only, they felt that they could conscientiously state that they had read it. And the making of this statement, it would appear, constituted the sole incentive to and aim

of all their reading. It never occurred to them that literature and life have any connection—anything in common; equally it never occurred to them to suspect a certain futility in their studies. They were perfectly satisfied. It followed, not unnaturally, that Slerracombe House had the reputation, in some quarters, of being a dull house. When the family moved up to London, the dulness went too, and spread itself over the residence in Grosvenor Crescent, or Bryanston Square, or Brook Street, or anywhere else that Mrs. Crookenden had taken for the season. It was a serene, placid, well-bred dulness; an unexceptionably respectable manifestation of the presence of the great Goddess, so dear to the British mind and heart. But there, in the midst of them, the great Goddess did unquestionably and persistently sit enthroned.

And Aldham, I am afraid, did not do much on the present occasion to disturb the local atmosphere with any little breezes of liveliness, or lightning flashes of wit. He was preoccupied. He would have given a good deal for ten minutes alone with his hostess, for he possessed a gift of diplomacy with women. From them he could usually extract information if he really wanted to do so, without compromising himself or showing his hand. Cyprian had a rather elaborate theory as to the characteristics of the ideal priest. Among these he certainly classed the wisdom of the serpent as well as the harmlessness of the dove—a fine astuteness combined with

a serene inscrutability. It gave him much subjective pleasure to make play both with his astuteness and his inscrutability. But in the present case neither of these qualities had much chance of giving outward and visible sign of their existence. The two Miss Crookendens and their needlework remained constantly in waiting upon their mother. And this triumvirate of large, sleek, silent, amiable women was quite too much for the young clergyman. He might as well have attempted to diplomatize with, and extract information from, a trio of well-conditioned Cheshire cheeses, or other inanimate solid bodies of noble proportions.

So he left soon after luncheon, and took his way back through the bright, steaming streets—the sun had come out after a heavy thunder shower—to his aunt, Miss Harriet Aldham's comfortable house in Eccleston Square. He was undeniably perturbed in spirit. For the impression he had received during the course of the morning, made a very positive difference in his outlook. And this difference was not in the direction of increased personal happiness. Aldham was a religious man. He believed in the elevating effect of discipline, in the ennobling effect of trial. He held that the thwarting of earthly joy will eventually, if received with due submission, lead to an increase of the joy which is eternal. But his assent to these high doctrines was more the result of circumstance than of experience. And then, moreover, at two and thirty

instinct and desire are inconveniently strong, even in devout-minded and highly-cultivated persons. And instinct and desire are rank materialists, who have a disposition to look very suspiciously on the substitution of prospective and transcendental for immediate and mundane satisfactions. Mr. Aldham's lips were a good deal compressed and his expression was decidedly severe as he passed through the hall of the house in Eccleston Square.

The dining-room door stood open, and within he caught sight of the unmistakable form of Mary Crookenden's old Mulatto nurse, and heard her broken, guttural tones mingling queerly with the staccato of Mrs. Gregory, his aunt's invaluable housekeeper. Mrs. Chloe had remained faithful to some of the customs of the far-away southern plantation on which her youth had been passed. Even in the height of the London season she stoutly refused other headgear than a crimson and gold silk handkerchief, twisted into a turban-like cap over her tight-curling, grey hair. As this dab of gay colour caught the young man's eye he was aware of a curious leap of his pulse, which had nothing in the world to do either with things diplomatic or things eternal and transcendental. It annoyed him, and yet, dear me, how delicious it was! He ran upstairs. And then, irritated at his own impetuosity and the character of the emotion that generated it, he waited a few seconds on the landing, before entering the drawing-room.

The scene presented to him was a graceful one. Mary Crookenden had just risen to go. She stood in the archway connecting the two light-coloured, fresh-looking rooms. Her hand rested in that of the pretty, little, old lady her hostess, and as she looked down at the latter there was a soft, shining brightness in her lovely eyes. Miss Crookenden dressed extremely well in these days—almost unnecessarily well, her aunt Caroline thought. Yet that lady, with the best will in the world—best though unconscious—to pick holes, found it impossible to prefer her old charge of vulgarity against her niece's appearance. Miss Crookenden carefully eschewed what was startling. A *genre tapageur* was by no means to her taste. But she liked to be exquisite. And after all, why should not a young lady of fortune, with no very serious duties to engage her attention, apply her mind to being exquisite? Nature had given her a pretty broad hint in that direction by endowing her with so charming a face and figure. She merely took the hint. That was all.

On the present occasion she was arrayed in a dress of the palest and softest blue and white muslin—an elaborate construction of flounces and draperies, diversified by lace and ingenious loops and knots of ribbon. Her hat was adorned with more loops and knots, as was the top of her lace parasol. The dressmaker who had confected this diaphanous costume must have been a true artist in her way. The highest art, we know, reproduces the effect

of nature, on the principle of the meeting of extremes. She had, apparently, pressed summer clouds into her service, and had cut yards off the blue sky, where it grows frail against the horizon, to produce suitable clothing for her customer. Miss Crookenden's appearance, indeed, was altogether ethereal, for she belonged to that rare type of fair women who—if the poor little adjective had not been so hard-worked of late years that one fights rather shy of using it—are best described as dusky blondes. Her hair had the shaded brightness about it which the French call *blond cendré*. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were dark; while her skin was of the peculiar warm, waxen whiteness you see in the petals of some flowers, notably in fresh magnolia blossoms. If Kent Crookenden prophesied that his little niece would grow into a remarkably pretty person, his prophecy had found generous fulfilment.

At eighteen, upon the death of her father, the young girl had practically become her own mistress. Her uncle, it is true, exercised nominal authority over her. But the Rector was not a stern disciplinarian, particularly where Mary was concerned. And Madame Jacobini—who has already been mentioned as a distant cousin of the Crookendens, more distinguished for the romantic aspects of her marriage than its social and material advantages—who for some years had acted as companion to her young kinswoman, found it undesirable, sweet though the girl's nature was, to hold her with a tight rein.

Mary had a good two thousand a year. She had an extremely decorative little house in St. George's Road, the front of it painted pale blue at this period. She had a certain originality of speech and manner that marked her out definitely from most of the young girls about her, and a gift for drawing and painting which raised her performances considerably above those of the average amateur. In short, Miss Crookenden had a position and a reputation. Perhaps she was disposed to reckon both more highly than they deserved. Many of us are inclined to fall into the mistake of measuring our importance, not by the magnitude of our attainments, so much as by the limited area of the stage on which they are displayed. Mary Crookenden was queen of a small country. And I fear that the fact of her royal prerogative, rather than narrow boundaries of her dominions, was oftenest present to her thoughts. But on the present occasion it was certainly Miss Crookenden's obvious excellencies, not her possible defects, which impressed Cyprian Aldham as she greeted him smilingly.

'You are here at last,' she said. 'We have been sitting on the edges of our chairs for a good half-hour expecting you.'

'Yes, dear child, I am afraid I have delayed her,' broke in Miss Harriet, in her little, coaxing, explanatory manner. 'She is on her way to some great afternoon party, but I begged her to wait. I so wanted you just to see her.'

Miss Aldham had been pretty at seventeen, she was still

very pretty at over seventy, as she stood holding the young girl's hand caressingly and looking up with timid, short-sighted eyes, at the tall young clergyman. She idolised her nephew. Nothing, in her opinion, could possibly be too good for him; and his presence filled not only her gentle breast, but her sweet, faded countenance with a sort of tremulous rapture.

'Am I such a very fine sight, then, dear Miss Harriet?' Mary Crookenden asked, gaily.

'You are one of the sights I love best to see,' the old lady answered.

The grave, full tones of Miss Crookenden's voice gave a remarkable touch of dignity to her most playful, and even daring little speeches. She was, indeed, a rather confusing young lady to deal with. Her small audacities sometimes tempted the unwary to make advances which they subsequently had cause to regret. It was unwise to take too great advantage of Miss Crookenden's graciousness. You frequently got a snub for your pains. Cyprian Aldham was by no means given to indiscreet advances, so he fared very well, as a rule, at the young lady's hands. She turned to him now with that soft shining still in her eyes. And it must be conceded that he found her absolutely enchanting.

'You are to be congratulated,' she said. 'You are very fortunate. You certainly possess the most delightful aunt in the world.'

Aldham bowed—'I know it,' he replied.

'My dear, my dear,' remonstrated the old lady, gently,—you both think much too highly of me. It is very kind of you; but I have never been considered at all a clever person.'

'Clever! why you have the most charming cleverness that exists,' Mary said—'the cleverness of making one feel as good as gold, pleased with oneself and everybody else. I was very cross when I came here. I was annoyed at having to go to Lady Combmartin's. I thought she had been impertinent, and I intended to tell her so. She has asked me and has not asked Madame Jacobini, and——'

'My dear, you are not going alone.'—Miss Harriet interposed this assertion or inquiry—it partook of the nature of both—in tones of modest horror. The habits of modern young women were as incomprehensible as they were alarming to her.

'Oh! no, Chloe will take me there. And Lancelot promised to look out for me, and place me in safety under Aunt Caroline's wing. Aunt Caroline's wing is the most unexceptionably correct of wings, you know.'

'Then, my dear, you ought to go. I ought not to keep you any longer. Mr. Crookenden will get tired of waiting.'

Mary looked down at her hostess' hand as it lay in hers encased in a fine, open-work, silk mitten, and stroked it tenderly.

'Yes, I ought to go,' she answered. 'Lancelot is ad-

mirably patient. He has never got tired of waiting yet, and this is by no means the first time I have kept him waiting. But it is hardly fair, is it, to trade upon his virtues ?'

'And Lancelot's patience has had a rather heavy strain put upon it to-day, already,' Cyprian Aldham remarked. —He spoke with a slight constraint, not quite naturally or easily.

'Oh ! he went to the Academy, after all, then ; and you met him there ? Poor dear Lance, I wonder what he thought of it all !'

'His criticisms were original ; but they were very much to his credit from the ethical point of view,' Aldham said, rather incisively.

'Oh ! they are safe to be that,' the girl rejoined, lightly. Then she bent her pretty head and kissed her hostess. 'Good-bye, dear Miss Harriet,' she went on. 'I really ought to go. It is a great pity. I would so much rather stay here with you, and hear about Lance in his character of art-critic. And then I wanted to hear something about Uncle Kent too. He doesn't write very often. Have you seen him lately, Mr. Aldham ? Do you know if he means to come up to London before we all go abroad ? How I wish he could be persuaded to go with us.'

Cyprian replied that he had been at Brattleworthy at the end of the previous week, and that the Rector had expressed no intention of coming to London. In fact

a journey of any description seemed as remote from his thoughts as could well be.

'He had just got some fresh books on his favourite subject of primitive marriage. He informed me that they contained many new and interesting facts. I do not think there is any prospect of his leaving home at present.'

Miss Crookenden's face clouded slightly.—'He sticks at Brattleworthy in the most hopeless way now,' she said. 'And I'm sure it cannot be good for him. He tells me he cannot afford holidays—why, I can't imagine. He says he has had no losses, and I have always understood he was very well off. But he seems to have developed a perfect mania for economy and retrenchment. You must have observed it? It makes me quite wretched.'

'You do not care about economy?' observed Cyprian, quickly.

Miss Crookenden smiled very prettily.—'No, I don't care much about it, I'm afraid. I believe I am a terrible spendthrift.'

'My dear, pray do not call yourself by such distressing names,' pleaded Miss Harriet, gently.

'Oh! I don't call myself a spendthrift. I call myself generous, indifferent to base considerations of pounds, shillings, and pence; superior to the love of money which is the root of all evil, anything and everything the reverse of that most objectionable thing named stingy,' the girl

answered, brightly. 'It is dear Sara Jacobini who calls me a spendthrift.'

'And your uncle,' suggested Aldham.

'No, there you do him an injustice,' she answered, gravely. 'Uncle Kent is only—well—near, where he himself is concerned. He assures me he never realized how interesting life could be till he became a miser. A miser! —it makes me miserable, but, really, absurd as it seems, that is the only word. I believe soon he will deny himself the actual necessaries of life.'

Several passages in the above conversation had proved anything but reassuring to Mr. Aldham. He spoke now with his habitual courtesy of demeanour but with a slight lapse in his habitual taste and tact.

'I do not think you need be seriously anxious on that point, Miss Crookenden. I had the pleasure of dining with your uncle about a fortnight ago, and I did not observe any tendency to asceticism which could be described as dangerous. There were no signs of positive want.'

Mary opened her beautiful eyes rather wide, and fixed them on the speaker. She appeared surprised.

'Please, understand,' she said, 'that if you have the most delightful aunt in the world, I, in my opinion, am the happy owner of quite the most delightful uncle.'—Turning to the old lady, she added, softly:—'He spoils me, Miss Harriet. Ever since I can remember he has

petted, and indulged, and spoilt me. And, dear me, it is very, very nice to be spoilt.'

'It would not be very easy to spoil you, my dear, I think,' Miss Aldham put in, perhaps rather inconsequently. She was anxious that these young people should part on the best terms possible, and she was vaguely sensible that the conversation had turned a trifle sour, somehow.

'Wouldn't it? I wish I thought that,' Mary said, her tone changing. 'But I really must go. Think of poor Lance, all this time, waiting on the outskirts of a crowd of footmen! Think of the annihilating composure with which Aunt Caroline will receive me, and proceed to point out that, as usual, I am dreadfully late. *Au revoir*, dear Miss Harriet. You help in the spoiling. I shall come back again in a day or two for another dose.'

And with that, Mary Crookenden, in her vaporous blue and white flounces and ribbons, swept away downstairs and into the guardianship of the watchful and devoted Mrs. Chloe, followed by Cyprian Aldham as far as the front door.

The pretty old lady, meanwhile, sat down on one of the pale chintz-covered sofas upstairs, and smoothed down the lap of her grey satin dress with a quick movement of the hands as of some sweet, quakerish, little bird preening its feathers.

'Dearest Cyprian,' she said, 'he loves her, and no wonder. She is a lovely creature. And she will love

him too. How can she help it? I wish he would speak? Perhaps he thinks he is not well enough off to propose to her—dear child, calling herself a spendthrift! But I think I can rectify that; I must tell him—though it makes me a little nervous—he can have all he wants.'

She smoothed down her grey satin lap again. 'Ah! please God,' she went on, 'I may live to see it! Precious boy.—Then I could indeed say my Nunc Dimittis cheerfully.'

Does desire ever fail? I think not; whatever, according to the revisers of the Old Testament, may happen to its alternative, the caperberry.

Chapter IV.

The famous conductor raises his *baton*—two beats—and then from the red and yellow band-stand, on the left, the first notes of the polished, courtly introduction to Weber's '*Invitation à la valse*' sweep out on the evening air.

'Ah, what a relief! After the drench of Wagnerian discords I endured during three mortal hours last night to please you, Mary, this comes like a return of the golden age.'

The speaker, a lady of middle-age, leaned her shoulder against one of the iron pillars of the wide open gallery running along the front of the great conservatories, and beat out the time of the air on the top of the balustrade with thin nervous fingers on which sparkled a rather

superfluous number of rings. She was frankly ugly. Her brown skin was parchment-like and wrinkled. Her forehead was crossed by many hard lines. There were hard lines, too, about her large mouth. Her grey hair, frizzed thickly in front, looked harsh against her dark face. Her eyes were brown, and at this moment extremely bright, as she moved her head to and fro in sympathy with the music, and stared, with the assurance of a person who is accustomed to publicity and perfectly secure of herself, at the slowly circulating crowd and the rows of people sitting on the terrace below. I have described this lady as frankly ugly, yet those who saw her for the first time generally received an impression of a far from plain woman. For there was an extraordinary mobility in her expression, her face was so vivacious and clever, her self-assurance imposed so upon the observer's imagination, that I have often—even after an acquaintance of long standing—found myself watching Madame Jacobini with as much interest as though she had been a well-accredited beauty.

The year of which we are speaking was among the first of those in which the British public, distinguishing itself by the discovery that it is more agreeable to be out of doors than indoors on a hot midsummer evening, proceeded, under the plea of improving its mind by studies, inventive, hygienic, piscatorial or imperial, to spend some hours nightly in the gardens that occupied the space be-

tween the back of the Exhibition buildings and the conservatories of the Royal Horticultural Society. No doubt they do these things better in France. The English nature, even in moments of legitimate frivolity, commits itself with a certain reserve to its amusements. Yet, although the press of human figures occupying the large stage were, as Madame Jacobini allowed, somewhat lacking in superficial gaiety and animation, the general effect was a brilliant one.

The gardens appeared vast and fantastic as some scene from the Arabian Nights under the lines of softly tinted lanterns festooned from tree to tree. Each grass plat was edged by tiny globes of jewelled light. The shrubs broke into strange blossoming of rosy lamps which were doubled by reflections in the gleaming surface of water. The air was thick with the sound of music; the monotonous hum of hundreds of quiet English voices; the stir of hundreds of well-set English footsteps pacing the central terrace and all the diverging alleys and wide stone stairways; with the splash and tinkle of fountains falling in broken rainbows of amber, ruby, or lambent green; and with the hoarse roar, like the ceaseless urgent beat of some tideless sea, of all London stretching away for miles outside, north, south, and east and west. While high in mid-air, in singular contrast to the fairy-like space of rich conflicting colour, of strangely tinted foliage, and shifting human figures below, the cold merciless stare of the electric light—

harsh and untempered as the spirit of modern science to which it owes its birth—showed dazzling against the sombre curtain of the sky, and called into hard relief the roofs and parapets of the neighbouring buildings.

'How any one in their senses,' continued Madame Jacobini, 'can find relaxation or inspiration in listening to music that is a cross between an acrostic, a sermon, and a problem in the higher mathematics, with spectacular incidents tacked on to it worthy only of a second-rate pantomime, I own I do not understand. Of course I know it may be said Weber paved the way. He was an innovator, and had the abominably bad taste to be born a German too. But nothing will persuade me he would not have held his ears and cried "Enough" before the end of the first act of any one of Wagner's operas. Tee-tee, tum-tee, tee-tee, tum-tee—ah! ah!—delicious, ravishing,' she exclaimed, as the subtle melody swept on. 'Listen to that enchanting lift and then the drop! It gathers up all the happy and all the desperate things that have ever happened in a ball-room. Dear me, the man who conceived that must have been something of a wizard!'

'Signor Jacobini was a disciple of Weber's?' inquired Mary Crookenden.

The girl sat well back in the chair, which she had dragged out of the rank, and turned round facing the front of the open gallery. There was a repose, a pretty indo-

lence in her attitude, which formed a marked contrast to the vivacity of her companion.

'Jacobini, poor dear creature, was unfortunately obstinately and exclusively his own disciple,' returned the latter. 'Otherwise I should now, I suppose, be drawing a comfortable income from the royalties on his sixteen operas. Dear, execrable little operas!—You never heard one of them performed, Mary?'

Miss Crookenden shook her head in smiling silence.

'No, of course you never did. They all died of neglect or inanition with fearful rapidity. Yet there were some charming airs in them. Did I tell you I heard an air from one of them—"The Silesian Lover"—ground out on a very, very old organ in St. George's Road the other day? It met me like a ghost at the street corner, that poor little tune. In a moment of sentiment I gave the rascally Italian organ-grinder five shillings.'

'That was an error of judgment, Sara,' the young lady remarked.—Madame Jacobini, it may be stated in passing, requested that her Christian name might always be pronounced in the Italian manner and written without the final h.—'He will go in the strength of that five shillings up and down St. George's Road for many days. And, you know you hate an organ.'

Madame Jacobini huddled her velvet and fur mantle closer about her thin shoulders—she was one of those persons who are preternaturally sensitive to cold—with

a little grimace and quick, half humorous, half melancholy smile, as she let her eyes linger on the long perspective of swaying lanterns.

'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'the poor silly superannuated little tune made me feel young again—for three minutes, at least. So it was cheap, uncommonly cheap, my dear, at five shillings.'

'Forgive me—I was stupid,' Miss Crookenden said. 'I ought not to have said that; it was very thoughtless.'

Madame Jacobini turned to the girl, contemplated the charming upturned face, and then answered, laughing quietly:—'You will readily be forgiven greater sins than this, Mary, I fancy, if you only beg pardon for them looking as you look now.'

Miss Crookenden sank back in her chair. It was not easy to say how far she relished such outspoken allusions to her beauty. The aspects of her character were, as we have said, contradictory. And if she had moments of audacity, in which she indulged in rather unconventional breadth of speech and action, she had also moments of proud modesty, in which she shrank, with an instinctive movement of self-protection, from compliments which most pretty women can swallow without any winking. Outwardly this young lady was remarkably finished and mature. Inwardly, in mind and heart, she was delightfully vague and inexperienced. I say delightfully, and yet it must be admitted that the results of this inexperience

often proved inconvenient both to herself and others. Miss Crookenden refused to see what was unlovely, to admit the existence of what was impure. If she needs must touch pitch, she would whitewash her pitch first, believing thereby to escape defilement. Many of the sweetest and noblest women go through life practising these pious frauds upon themselves. It is impossible not to honour them. Yet fraud, even of this high-minded description, remains fraud still and brings its inevitable punishment along with it.

Madame Jacobini's experience of life, on the other hand, had been pretty mixed. With a high standard of personal conduct she combined a large toleration for the follies and frailty of her fellow-creatures. She had known dear good people often do that which was very much the reverse of dear or good. She continued to hope all things, being a generous-natured woman. But she had learned to expect little. She was not easily surprised, easily shocked. Consequently it was alarming to her to watch Mary Crookenden—to note the girl's refusal to be enlightened regarding the seamy side of life. Madame Jacobini was often at a loss how to act for the best in this matter. She saw that her young charge had a disconcerting tendency to walk very near the edge of small social precipices without at all measuring the inconveniences of that style of promenade. Should she call out and warn her in plain English? Should she remain silent? Inno-

cence, in pictures, is represented as guarded by strong detachments of ever-watchful angels. But Madame Jacobini's faith in the vigilance of these celestial guardians was a trifle shaky. The story of Una and the lion, though vastly pretty and encouraging, is, she had reason to fear, apocryphal. Yet to rub the bloom of guilelessness off the girl's mind was an odious and ungrateful task. The elder woman shrank from it in honest disgust; and ended by contenting herself with throwing out pretty broad hints, which she trusted her young friend might profit by. Hints that, as a rule I fear, rather offended the taste than illumined the social understanding of that wilfully, and in a sense, beautifully blind maiden.

It was probably in furtherance of this project—a mild casting out of devils by Beelzebub—that after a while Madame Jacobini spoke again. She had been gazing about her in her usual frank, unapologetic manner, considering the crowd, which grew denser upon the terrace below, and the passers-by in the gallery. She was naturally gregarious. The unreal theatrical aspect of the scene appealed to her strongly. Her sense of drama was keen—keen to the point of sometimes perceiving drama where it can hardly be said to have existed.

'There is your Russian again, Mary,' she remarked. 'He has just posted himself by the conservatory entrance. This is not so good a place for staring as the opera; and owing to your position he can only behold your hat. But

he commands a fine uninterrupted view of me. *Je ne suis pas la rose, mais j'ai vécu près d'elle*, so let us hope he derives a measure of satisfaction from looking at me.'

'He is not a Russian,' Miss Crookenden said. 'I was sure of that last night. He is as English as we are ourselves.'

'Oh! well that is not saying very much. You, my dear, are half American. And I——, well by marriage, and adoption, and tastes, and so on, I belong to half the nations of Europe.'

'A mongrel, in fact,' observed Mary, very gently.

'Precisely, and that is why your dear aunt, Mrs. Crookenden, detests me so cordially.'—Madame Jacobini made a distinctly wicked grimace this time.

'That reminds me,' Mary said, being rather anxious to change the conversation, 'I found out about Aunt Caroline's movements. She leads forth the Chosen People——'

'Don't be profane,' put in Madame Jacobini.

'But they are chosen, most carefully chosen.—The two girls, of course; Lady Dorothy; Lance, if he can be caught; Lady Alicia and Mr. Winterbotham and Violet, —they can be caught without any difficulty at all,—and she leads them forth, as I was going to tell you, on Thursday, *viâ* Paris, Pontarlier, and Lausanne.'

'Then we——' began Madame Jacobini.

'Representing the mixed multitude that followed them out of Egypt, Sara?'

'We will go on Friday——'

'Friday is a very unlucky day for a journey,' remarked Miss Crookenden.

'Not so unlucky as a Thursday, when it would necessitate travelling with your aunt. We will go on Friday, by Calais, Lâon, and Berne. Which way and when does Mr. Aldham go?'

'I don't know.'—There was a silence.

'Dear me, I wish something would happen,' Mary remarked presently. 'I wonder why they don't come—Adolphus Carr and Mr. Aldham, I mean. They ought to be here by this time. Can't you see them, Sara? Lance is generally pretty obvious.'

'I see no one but the Russian,' replied Madame Jacobini, returning rather maliciously to the charge. 'His eyes are oblique, and his moustache grows up away from his lip—you know how I mean, and he has the figure of a bear. He is a Russian from the south-eastern provinces, with a strong dash of Tartar blood. I am never mistaken in a nationality.'

'His clothes are English. At least they were last night.'

'Clothes!' cried Madame Jacobini, contemptuously. 'They prove nothing. In these days we are the tailors of the universe. He is a Russian, I tell you, a Socialist, a Nihilist, something tremendous, and'—she paused a moment,—'he is distractedly anxious to have another look at you.'

'I wish they would come,' Miss Crookenden repeated. She got up from her chair with much indolent grace, and rested her hands on the iron balustrade. 'I wonder I don't see Lancelot. I told him where to meet us.'

She stood for a minute or two scanning the gardens below, and then turning round, glanced slowly up and down the gallery. She sat down suddenly again, her charming face wearing an expression of active annoyance. —'How extremely unpleasant!' she exclaimed. 'Your Russian was staring this way.'

'He usually is staring this way,' put in the other lady, parenthetically.

'But I had no notion he was so near. I found myself looking him full in the face.'

'Dear, dear, what a cruel misfortune—specially for him, poor man,' cried Madame Jacobini, putting up both hands and eyebrows.

'As I told you, he is an Englishman,' the girl continued, rather loftily ignoring the interruption. 'And now I remember him perfectly. I thought I recognized him last night. I saw him at that big party of the Ostler Westcott's I went to with Mrs. Frank Lorimer, when you had a headache, and couldn't go—you remember? He stood in a corner and shoals of people were taken and introduced to him, and he glared at them like a wild beast in a cage.'

'Dear me, how very disagreeable,' remarked Madame

Jacobini. 'In any case he has departed now. There he goes down the steps.'

'I meant to have asked who he was, and then we went, or I forgot, or something——'

'Oh! here you are, Polly. That's all right. I've been hunting all over the place for you. It was the merest chance I found you. Why have you turned your chair round the wrong way?'

Madame Jacobini received the speaker, Lancelot, with one of her wide genial smiles. She had a great kindness for this good-looking, simple-minded, far-away cousin.—'Mary and I always turn our chairs the wrong way on principle. It is an assertion of personal liberty, a private declaration of independence.'

'I can't sit in a row,' said Miss Crookenden. 'It is so terribly inartistic to sit in a row. That is a refinement of feeling you don't appreciate, Lance. You would always be willing to sit in a row.'

The young man smiled down at her with a very pretty mixture of adoration, protection, and endearment.—'Oh! I don't know, Polly,' he said, good-humouredly. 'I never thought about it. I suppose I generally do what everybody else does. It doesn't seem to be worth while to be peculiar, you know, unless there's a good deal to be gained by it.'

Nevertheless he turned a chair round, and placed it in close proximity to his cousin's.

'Aldham and Carr will be here directly,' he added, as he did so. 'They stopped to speak to some man on the steps.—I say, Madame Jacobini, what's the matter? Why are you laughing?'

'I only wondered whether you gained a good deal on the present occasion by being peculiar.'

Lancelot waited before replying. Perhaps he did not catch her meaning at first.—'Yes, I believe I do, Madame Jacobini,' he said presently, very quietly. 'And I mean to make the most of it. I am afraid it mayn't last.'

Mary turned her charming head away.

'Ah! here they come!' she said. 'My dear Lance, what has happened to you? You become oracular.'—Then, without waiting for an answer, she rose and went a step or two forward to meet the two gentlemen as they advanced slowly towards her.

Madame Jacobini, hitching up her mantle about her shoulders, moved forward also. As we have said, this good woman had a remarkable gift for the perception of drama. It led her not infrequently to commit indiscretions. Now, as Lancelot got up and stood aside to let her pass, she read, or fancied she read a silent appeal in his expression. She was soft-hearted and it moved her.—'It will last,' she said, impulsively. 'Don't be afraid. It ought to last. It must last—that is if you really want it to.'

'Want it to?—Why,' the lad broke out, 'why I've never wanted anything else as long as I can remember.'

Madame Jacobini opened her mouth and brought her teeth together with a little snap.

'Eh! eh! my dear young man!' she said softly. The drama was of a profounder character than she had anticipated. Where there is smoke there is always fire, says the proverb. But in this case she had been quite unprepared to see the flame blaze up so brightly.

Chapter V.

At this point I must request the reader to picture to himself Cupid as a bachelor of fifty, well-preserved, faultlessly arrayed in accordance with the existing fashion; his wanton humours reduced to a dainty discretion; his freakishness sobered by a large acquaintance with the world. Cupid, in short, as an accomplished gentleman of to-day. A person of means, of leisure, and elegant tastes; a successful amateur of the fine arts, with a pretty little talent for music, painting, and the writing of fiction; and a considerable influence in that section of society where art and letters join hands with the smart world. Picture this, I say, and you have a very fair portrait of Mr. Adolphus Carr.

During some months in the year it was Mr. Carr's habit to keep open house at his charming place in Sussex. But, notwithstanding his graceful gift of landscape painting, the pavement was more congenial to him than the

long upward roll of the Sussex downs, the hanging woods and rich hop-gardens of that delectable county. I may add, perhaps, that the opera was more congenial to him than the singing of birds; and the elaborate posturings of some fair *figurante* than the gambols of those rather overrated quadrupeds, the young lambs, whether bounding —as in the pages of the poets—to the sound of the tabor, or in alarmed response to the barking of the sheep-dog, as in ordinary life. Simple tastes are, after all, among the most difficult things in the world to cultivate. Mr. Carr extolled the country but he loved the town. Discretion was his forte. Even in the privacy of his own mind he practised a certain ingenious indirectness. Otherwise he would probably have asserted that there is a distressing element of nakedness, so to speak, in the country. It is all so terribly definite. Its few inhabitants, and the manners and customs of them, are so clearly recognizable, as almost indecently distinct.

This being the attitude of Mr. Carr's mind it will readily be understood that, upon the evening in question, as he advanced down the gallery, through the spaces of tinted shadow and tempered brightness, surrounded by the close-packed, well-dressed, slow-moving crowd; and bowed, finally, with discreetly affectionate civility over the hand of our highly-finished young lady, Miss Crookenden, his soul was satisfied, he was comfortable in spirit, he was entirely at his ease. There was no distressing element

of nakedness here. Civilization had gone far towards doing her perfect work. Nature, whether human or otherwise, was agreeably removed from its primitive, rudimentary conditions. There was no shocking directness about it. It was all modestly veiled—in a sense at least.

But Mr. Carr was nothing if not polite. He immediately began to account for himself with an air of admirably serious mildness.

'We should have presented ourselves sooner, Miss Crookenden—how d'ye do, Madame Jacobini? A delightful evening, isn't it? Even our English climate has its happy moments. Yes, as I was saying, we should have been here before—ah! there is Crookenden! He ran away from us—but I happened to see James Colthurst—you know his pictures? Yes, of course.—And Aldham was anxious to be introduced to him.'

Mr. Carr arranged himself neatly in a chair between the two ladies. In talking he always had the effect of communicating a secret of grave importance to his auditors, which must on no account be allowed to go any further, as the phrase is. This is a most useful style of manner. It is obviously complimentary to the hearer, while it practically leaves the speaker in full possession of the conversation. For who would be so indelicate as to interrupt the teller of a secret?

'Colthurst is a singular person. There is an immense amount of force in him—something cosmic, really

cosmic. You know him by sight, Miss Crookenden, of course?'

The young lady made a sign of dissent.

Lancelot shifted his position, causing the legs of his chair to scroop on the asphalt.—'Have you had any very jolly music to-night, Madame Jacobini?' he asked, suddenly.

But Mr. Carr went forward serenely with his narration.

'No really, Miss Crookenden? I should have thought you must have seen him. He is peculiar looking, and he has been about a good deal this season. I have been interested in him for some time, I confess. The prejudice against his work has been very strong; even now it yields unwillingly. He belongs to the school of Bastien-Lepage, and in a degree to that of Jean François Millet.'

'More to that of Bastien-Lepage than of Millet, I should say,' put in Aldham, smiling.

'Yes, perhaps. The religious element certainly is not conspicuous. There was a picture of his some years ago in the Grosvenor—you would hardly remember it, Miss Crookenden—which brought a storm of abuse down upon him. It was not pleasant, I own. Still, I thought at the time, and I still think, the expression of feeling it called out was exaggerated. He is a realist, of course, and of a very pronounced type. But his realism is not devoid of poetry. There is nothing really objectionable in it—nothing gross.'

Lancelot who, since his unsuccessful sally, had been

leaning forward with his elbows on the arms of his chair, and apparently making a critical examination of the pavement between his feet, here glanced up at Cyprian Aldham.

'That depends upon what you mean by gross,' he murmured.

'His pictures are detestably melancholy, in any case,' broke in Madame Jacobini. 'My dear Mr. Carr, you cannot deny it. They are *assomant.* But there! so is all the art of the present day. *Tout lasse, tout passe, tout casse*—that is what it is for ever telling you. Preach, preach, preach!—I am not abusing sermons, Mr. Aldham. They are most edifying things in their proper place, and no one enjoys listening to a good one more than I do. But sermons in action, and when you want to cheer and comfort your eyes with the sight of something pretty too, —it is prodigiously trying. I don't need to go to a picture gallery to learn that there are miserable, paralytic, pitiable objects in the world, like that wretched old drover in "The Evening of Labour." Or that there are foolish young men and women either, with whom repentance will probably come too late. "The Road to Ruin," now, what——'

At this juncture Mary Crookenden's large white feather fan slipped, with a little crash, on to the ground.

'Ah, how stupid of me. Thanks; no, it is not broken. This is not its first tumble, poor thing. I am always for-

getting it. I must have a ribbon put on to it,' she said, in her low, sweet voice, as Aldham picked it up and presented it to her.

'Oh! yes, I sympathize to a very great extent.'—Mr. Carr addressed himself to Madame Jacobini.—'Colthurst's work does strain too much, I admit. It is restlessly full of intention. Yet it is impossible not to respect him. He has shown such dogged persistence in the face of adverse criticism. He has submitted to poverty, real pressing poverty for years—that I know on the best authority—rather than paint for mere popularity. And with his great technical skill, he might easily have been popular had he pleased. He deserves his success in that way, at all events. He has paid a severe price for it. False or true he has suffered for his faith.'

'That is fine,' Mary Crookenden said, slowly. 'I don't think we have any of us done that quite, have we?' she went on, diligently smoothing and arranging the feathers composing her fan, crumpled by their fall.—'Sara, I know you would give your head for the triumph of Italian over German opera. And Mr. Aldham, I am sure, would suffer directly if necessary—die joyfully for a dogma. And Lance would be shot at the shortest possible notice for—oh! for a whole lot of things—even if he did not quite understand what they were—if I begged him very nicely to be shot. And I—no doubt there are founts of heroism in me also.'

The young girl clasped her hands and surveyed her companions with a strange little laugh. Two of the said companions, at least, though startled by her words, found her most bewilderingly lovely just then.

'But nobody wants us to suffer. Nobody wants to martyr us. Nobody will take the trouble to give us a chance of showing off our fine qualities.'—She bent forward, smiling.—'Mr. Carr, will you do me a great kindness?'

'With the sincerest pleasure—any in the world, short of supplying you with an opportunity for martyrdom, my dear Miss Crookenden,' he answered, suavely.

'Go and find Mr. Colthurst then, and bring him here, and introduce me to him. I want to know somebody who has'—Mary stopped suddenly, and laughed again. 'Is it not rather absurd though?' she said. 'Am I not making a mountain out of a mole-hill? Look at all this, at the lights, the fountains—listen to that valse tune. Is there any such grisly thing as suffering after all? Any such thing as poverty? Or as convictions? Surely they are all delusions. Well then, if they are, it will be all the more entertaining to make Mr. Colthurst's acquaintance. It will be all the more diverting to see a realist—when one knows there is nothing really real—a realist who has gone the length of actually suffering, suffering that most odious of all things too, poverty, for the sake of his—yes, they must be so—his delusions!'

For once Mr. Carr's tact deserted him. Miss Crookenden's address had taken all her hearers by surprise. Aldham was not only surprised but annoyed. His idol was presenting herself in a new aspect. Aldham was by no means weak, though he was in love. There were points, he began to think, in which his idol would bear slight reconstruction. He felt entirely equal to carrying out such reconstruction when the time should arrive. His expression grew severe, for he objected to being surprised—specially by a woman.

Mr. Carr, on his part, was not only surprised, but embarrassed. He had interested himself warmly in Colthurst's fortunes. Had interested critics in him too; had spoken a good word for him to newspaper editors; had presented him to capitalists with a hankering after modern pictures; had, in short—for notwithstanding his artificiality and general slightness of make this elderly Cupid was extremely kind-hearted—had, I say, done a large amount of wire-pulling and discreet puffing. But it is quite one thing to help forward a struggling artist yourself, and quite another to present him to a very exquisite young lady, possessed of two thousand a year and an enthusiasm for the fine arts—a young lady of whose charms you have so high an appreciation, that possibilities of the tenderest description have presented themselves more than once to your imagination.

Moreover there were queer rumours about James Colt-

hurst. Mr. Carr was not one of those who give proof of their own immaculate cleanliness by much curious inspection of their neighbours' dust-bins. He let the rumours rest. He neither inquired into them, nor repeated them. That the painter had lived pretty hard, he thought more than possible. But it was really no business of his. Social life was in his opinion a nicely constructed show, wherein a good deal necessarily went on behind the scenes, which was not intended for the eyes of the public seated in the boxes, stalls, or pit. The actors were at their best upon the stage. Common courtesy demands that it is by the figure they cut there you should judge them. To pursue them into the dressing-rooms, and examine them wigless and unpainted; to note the peculiarities of the poor, knock-kneed, would-be king, queen, or courtier, deprived of all bravery of buckram and tinsel, is a stupidity and outrage. Yet liberal-minded as he was—liberal-minded many good persons will doubtless remark to the verge of laxity—Adolphus Carr permitted himself a measure of discrimination. He would not cast a stone—heaven forbid!—at any one. But he held that men are divisible into several orders. And that one of these is composed of individuals, who, though most agreeable companions to members of their own sex, are not equally eligible acquaintances for young, unmarried ladies whom you hold in the most respectful esteem.

'I shall be delighted,' he said, after a perceptible interval of hesitation.

Lancelot had risen uneasily from his seat. He stood resting one hand on the back of his cousin's chair. The young man was acutely uncomfortable. He wanted to put a stop to the whole matter. But words did not come readily to him. He did not see how to say anything without saying too much.

'Delighted of course'—Carr went on, passing one lady-like hand over his cheek, and toying a little with his eye-glass—'if I can find Mr. Colthurst. But I fancy he was leaving when we met him. And there is this further little difficulty. He is, as I remarked just now, a peculiar person, Miss Crookenden. He is rather shy, rather *gauche*, I must own. And he has an honest horror of being lionized. Perhaps he may not appreciate his good fortune. It is even conceivable that he may refuse to obey your summons.'

To make this rejoinder went sorely against the grain with Adolphus Carr. It was, he felt, anything but a graceful speech to address to a lady. But he trusted it might give his fair neighbour a hint which would make her abstain from insisting on her request. As he finished speaking he cast a discreetly meaning glance upon Madame Jacobini enlisting her support and intervention.—Her response was prompt.

'Ah! look, Mary!' she cried with much animation,

'there is our bone of contention again. Mr. Carr shall decide. Miss Crookenden and I have had a warm discussion as to the nationality of that particularly plain person. I say he is a Russian; but Miss Crookenden declares'—

'I declare nothing. I am very much bored by our bone of contention,' the girl remarked, coolly.

'No, no,' the elder lady insisted. 'It is a point of honour with me to be right in my nationalities. We will have Mr. Carr's opinion. You see the man, there? He is unmistakeable. He has the figure of a bear, and he walks like a cat.'

'Great Scott!' murmured Lancelot Crookenden.

The young man had been quick for once. A good deal quicker than Adolphus Carr, indeed. The latter put up his eye-glass daintily, and gazed in the direction indicated. Presently he dropped it again, and dangled it by its single, fine, gold cord with a certain deliberation. He did not echo Lancelot's crude little expression of feeling; but he, too, feared that Madame Jacobini had very neatly and completely performed the feat commonly known as jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire.

'Well?' demanded that lady. 'Well?'

'You are mistaken in your nationality on the present occasion,' Carr answered. 'That is the person we have been speaking of—Mr. James Colthurst, the painter.'

'Eh! eh!'—and Madame Jacobini's little grimace was expressive of considerable relief. She was disposed to

applaud the guardian angels, and congratulate them on behaving with most praiseworthy tact for once. She looked across maliciously at Mary Crookenden.

It happened that Mr. Aldham was observing Miss Crookenden also. His lips were compressed and his expression somewhat hard. He was not at all pleased. But displeasure did not make Aldham turn away. He did not spare himself. He looked closely, as a rule, at that which displeased him. Is it conceivable that he derived a subtle satisfaction from his own displeasure, that it ministered to his sense of his own superiority? Adolphus Carr's announcement had evidently taken Miss Crookenden altogether by surprise. Aldham saw her start. She rarely blushed, and she did not do so on this occasion. But her eyes dilated curiously. They appeared actually to glow with intensity of colour. Aldham noted a pause of indecision. Then she rose with a charming, indolent dignity, and addressed Mr. Carr.—'Ah!' she said, 'if that is Mr. Colthurst, I don't think he will refuse, if you will kindly ask him to come and speak to us.'

'But, my dear Mary, just consider—surely——' broke in Madame Jacobini, aghast, mindful of precipices, and very distrustful of guardian angels again.

Pride had made Miss Crookenden perverse. She had inadvertently got into a difficult position. She would have been glad to escape from it. But she had, so she

thought, committed herself too far. And in her desire to appear quite mistress of herself, she over-acted her part.

'Surely what, Sara?' she inquired, innocently. 'What is the matter? Can't you recover having made a mistake in your nationalities? What a pity it is we hadn't a small bet about the matter. I might have won a pair of gloves.'

Miss Crookenden held out her fan with a pretty air of command. Her eyes dilated again. Still her manner was faultlessly quiet, the tones of her voice gravely sweet.

'Dear Mr. Carr, if you value my friendship, go and catch Mr. Colthurst and bring him here. Madame Jacobini has called him a bear; well, then, let him be made to dance for us. It would be something new. I have been longing for something to happen, and this would suit me so nicely, for I have not seen a dancing bear for an age, and I dote on them. The last one I saw was at Brattleworthy. You must remember it, Lancelot. It came with two Frenchmen in blue blouses. It had on a big muzzle, poor dear beast, which looked horribly uncomfortable. And we fed it with cake on the lawn in front of the dining-room window.'

'This bear's another question,' Lancelot answered. 'I wouldn't try giving it cake.'

'Go, Mr. Carr, please,' Mary repeated, with gentle insistence.

Here Madame Jacobini emitted a sound expressive of

lively irritation. It may be rendered by the following alphabetical combination—'Tschah!' Then she turned upon Cyprian Aldham and inquired very briskly when and by what route he proposed travelling out to Switzerland.

'It—I—well, you know, Polly, I wish awfully you'd let it be,' blundered out poor Lancelot. 'We are very well as we are. He'll only be in the way. And between ourselves, I don't fancy that fellow Colthurst's looks a bit better than I do his pictures. I don't believe he's the sort of man for you to know. I'd very much rather you had nothing to do with him.'

But the remonstrance came too late. Mr. Carr, to whom anything in the form of even a verbal struggle was highly distasteful, had started on his little mission. The fact, meanwhile, that she knew herself to be in an equivocal position disposed Miss Crookenden to be resentful. When a woman has perpetrated a folly she usually revenges herself first upon the friend who has done his best to save her from perpetrating it. Mary, therefore, turned upon the devoted youth and incontinently smote him hip and thigh, veiling her blows under the most delightful smiles.

Dear old boy,' she said, 'do you know you really are a wee bit stupid and tiresome? I am afraid our tastes differ fundamentally. You are happiest with frumps. I am happiest with clever people. I like them. I like people

who make a fight and get on, and distinguish themselves. I will even go a little out of my way to know them. Don't try to interfere, Lance. Understand, once and for all, it is no use interfering.'

Lancelot answered bravely enough. He looked her straight in the eyes. But his smooth, sunburnt face grew rather pale, and his lips trembled.

'All right, Polly. There are some things I understand fast enough, though I am stupid and tiresome. I suppose I've been a fool. But I promise you I shan't interfere again. I'll remember.

Then he turned his back. He took a long, steady breath, filling his fine chest, and holding himself very upright—a young Hercules, though in regulation black coat and high collar—while he gazed down in a sort of amazement at the gay scene spread out before him. To his sight it had changed strangely in the last few moments; had become mocking, heartless, bewildering. He felt oddly alone, oddly aware of himself—cut off from his companions. Lancelot was a very simple fellow. He accepted his cousin's cruel little speech without criticism, without resentment. He was nothing to her. He was too dull, too common-place. Of course Polly had a perfect right to send him about his business if she felt like that. He did not blame her. Perhaps it was really the kindest thing she could do under the circumstances. But it made him sad, very sad. And that sensation was

a new one. In all his easy, pleasant, sweet-tempered life he had never been very sad before—at least, not in this same intimate, personal, penetrating way. It altered the relative value of everything. The landmarks were all changing; and great shadows, such as he had never seen till now, seemed to blot and chill his mental landscape. His frank, innocent, wholesome world had a sudden blight cast on it. If the sun rose to-morrow morning, it would be a different sun with less light and heat than of old.

And then, as he stared at the hundreds of men and women about him, he began to wonder if any of them felt, or ever had felt, just as he did now? It was surely a very gracious token of the lad's nature, that almost the first effect of his realization of personal suffering was this out-going of sympathy towards possible companions in misfortune.

Chapter VI.

Every one remembers the story of the fisherman, on the far Eastern sea-shore, investigating the contents of the bottle lying among the wrack in the sand—remembers the out-rush of the geni, enormous, vaguely menacing. Even Oriental impassivity and politeness failed, under consequent sensations, neatly, gracefully, composedly, to embark in ordinary conversation. The fisherman was horribly frightened—for a time, anyhow.

And it is hardly too much to assert that, at this particular juncture, Miss Crookenden came very near realizing the embarrassing sensations experienced by the said fisherman. In light-hearted, wilful curiosity she had uncorked a bottle, thrown up by the restless tide of social life at her feet. And certainly it appeared to her, when Colthurst, after a brief colloquy with Adolphus Carr, came forward in obedience to her summons and bowed, hat in hand, before her, that from out of it she had let loose an odd and even alarming sort of being. If she had been a little doubtful of the wisdom of her escapade before, she was doubly doubtful of it now. For once in her life she felt at a disadvantage. She turned shy and nervous. Something in Colthurst's presence, in his restless, comprehensive glances, disconcerted her. She feared she had adopted a *rôle* she was unequal to playing. Like the fisherman, polite conversation failed her. Like him, she was frightened.

For the effect of some persons is immediate and undeniable. You cannot help being aware of them. They have an extraordinary power of charging the surrounding atmosphere with the magnetism of their own personality. It is of this queer power, I suppose, that Goethe wrote under the title of 'the dæmonic influence'; and of which he says that, though not necessarily malign, it is, at first, almost invariably repulsive. And no wonder; for it puts out strong hands, and grasps at just those secret places

of the soul which ordinary human intercourse, ordinary human affections, leave wholly undisturbed, reposing in comfortably unintelligent silence and obscurity.

The last bars of Strauss' brilliant valse,—rapid and still more rapid, riotous almost, as it neared its conclusion,—were being rattled out by the band. Possibly the stern roll of the kettledrums and fierce clang of the cymbals, the breathless rush of hurrying notes ringing in her ears, helped to trouble Miss Crookenden. A final crash. Then an interval of comparative silence, through which James Colthurst's whispering, stammering accents rose into singular distinctness and importance.

'I am very much honoured by your permitting Mr. Carr to p-present me to you,' he said. 'I believe we have a common ground of interest, Miss Crookenden. I understand that you draw and paint well.'

The speech was abrupt in its directness. The speaker was abrupt, too, dominating, engrossing, possessive.—Just then a dropping fire of applause, tribute to the excellence of the musical performance lately concluded, broke from the crowded audience upon the terrace and gallery. To Mary Crookenden, coming at that particular moment, this had a startling effect. It heightened her sense of embarrassment. For it seemed as though she and the man standing before her formed the centre of attention; as though this great concourse of human beings had come together to witness their first meeting. A fateful

element seemed suddenly to have intruded itself amid the frivolous common-places of the evening. Mary had a fantastic feeling that a magic circle was being drawn around her, isolating her mysteriously with this stranger.

Instead of answering him, she turned half away, in sudden absurd shrinking from this imaginary publicity, in unreasoning desire for protection and escape. But none of her company of friends appeared disposed to come to her rescue. Lancelot's back was still towards her as he stared sadly out over the illuminated gardens. Aldham was nearer. He was watching her. But there was no softening of helpfulness, rather a reserve and doubtfully complimentary criticism, in his expression. Miss Crookenden divined that he, too, disapproved of her action. Adolphus Carr's ladylike countenance presented a civil blank. If the present situation in any way approximated to a 'free fight,' Mr. Carr evidently wished devoutly to be counted not 'in,' but 'out.' Madame Jacobini, moreover, showed an unsympathetic front. She was adjusting her mantle impatiently about her angular shoulders, talking loudly to everybody and nobody at the same time, with a rather ostentatious show of indifference.

'Do pray let us walk about,' she said. 'It is growing shockingly chilly.—The music is over, I suppose. They do play superbly; but I shall be quite content to hear God save the Queen, at a distance, all the same. The throne will be none the firmer for my standing still here

and catching a violent cold in my head listening to the National Anthem.—Yes, you're perfectly right, Mr. Carr; brass is the only thing that tells out of doors. Strings are nowhere. They are far too delicate for the open air.'—Madame Jacobini turned to the young girl.—'Are you coming, Mary? We are going to see the illumination of the big fountains, and then I am going home.'

As she spoke the lady treated Colthurst to the minutest fraction of a bow, subjecting him at the same time to a pretty searching scrutiny. She looked him well up and down, as the phrase is, and during that process the expression was far from conciliatory.

Miss Crookenden had asked bread of her friends, and it seemed to her that one and all of them presented her with the first stone that came handy. Lancelot's back, Cyprian's face, Mr. Carr's rather pusillanimous attitude, the tones of Madame Jacobini's voice, were alike discouraging. Everybody was unkind—so it seemed to the girl. Instead of helping her out of a difficulty, they combined to push her deeper into it. She rallied her pride. She determined to show them that she did not care one bit. Again she overacted her part.

'Oh! pray on no account catch cold, Sara,' she said, gravely. 'Your colds are a public calamity; they put out all one's plans. And that would be by no means amusing, just on the eve of going abroad. I am prepared not only to walk, but actually to run about, if it would prevent

your catching one. Please, Mr. Carr, don't allow her to stand still a single minute longer.'—Then she turned with a very pretty smile to Colthurst.—'Whoever told you I draw and paint well was more kind than truthful,' she said. 'But one does not quarrel very much with one's friends' untruthfulness if it helps to procure one an introduction to some one whom one is happy to know.—Would you mind taking this for me? I cannot agree with Madame Jacobini that it's chilly to-night, and so I should be glad to spare myself the weight of this thick cloak.—Thanks so much—oh yes, that sketch book! If you will kindly poke it well down into the pocket, it will be quite safe.'

Colthurst was not much used to acting as a squire of dames. He gathered up the pale green *câche misère* hanging over the back of Miss Crookenden's chair, and pushed the sketch-book back into the pocket of it, under an odd sense of excitement. The straight, proud glance of the young girl's eyes, her grave voice, her languid manner, stirred his blood. The two natures in Colthurst played their game of skill now, as persistently, and, for his own peace of mind, as dangerously, as they had played it ten years ago. And as the soft, rich folds of Mary Crookenden's cloak fell across his arm, the emotional nature was undoubtedly in the ascendant.

Madame Jacobini, meanwhile, as she led the way along the gallery, down the steps, across the crowded

terrace, and into a narrow alley on the right of the gardens,—Adolphus Carr talking, ignoring the prevailing sense of slight discomfort, with all his might, at her side, —Madame Jacobini raged inwardly. For she did not in the very least like the turn affairs had taken.

'Mary flirts most unconscionably,' she said to herself. And then directly she had said it she repented. The judgment was too harsh a one. For she knew perfectly well that Miss Crookenden probably cared no more to stimulate the admiration of this new acquaintance than she would have cared to stimulate the admiration of one of the turncocks managing the waterworks, or the electricians managing the dynamos.—'But how is he to know that, wretched man?' she continued. 'Of course, he will imagine she finds him enchanting.'

Madame Jacobini, on the contrary, did not find James Colthurst in the least enchanting, though she admitted she had been guilty of an exaggeration in describing him as an oblique-eyed Tartar. He was tall—about five feet eleven and a half, to be quite accurate; but a short neck and high, square shoulders detracted considerably from the effect of his height, and made the upper part of his person appear somewhat unwieldy. His chest was deep, and he held himself well. His arms were rather short; his hands handsome, finely modelled, full of character, broad in the palm, and very prettily set into the wrist. Colthurst knew this. He was very fond of his own hands and wrists.

They afforded him considerable satisfaction, and he always wore large, open wristbands, so as to afford them free play and exhibition.

In his make, as a whole, there was a singular combination of finish and clumsiness. Madame Jacobini, glancing at his long, neat legs and small feet, felt sure he must be an extremely good dancer. His head was large—wide when seen in profile, the distance from the nostril to the base of the skull being remarkable, yet the actual masque was rather narrow and square in shape. A deep horizontal line crossed the forehead, dividing it into two distinct portions, of which the lower one bulged noticeably over the eyebrows. Colthurst's eyes were reddish brown, opaque, and in form long and narrow, unshaded by much eyelash. They were sunk in close under the rim of the eye-socket, causing the upper lids almost to disappear when open. He had no hair on his face, save a fringed, rusty-red moustache, growing up away from the lip and leaving the mouth uncovered. His teeth were even and rather long. His skin had the dull sallow tone of a person not greatly addicted to country air and exercise.

It is needless to state that Madame Jacobini did not draw out this detailed inventory of the merits and demerits of James Colthurst's personal appearance as she treated him to a repressively curt bow on that particular July evening. She received no more than a general impression, in which bear and cat still claimed about equal

shares. But subsequent events impressed his looks and bearing, his hissing hesitating speech, his quick deft movements, the restless energy which possessed him and which he constantly strove to veil under an easy, pliant manner—subsequent events impressed all these, I say, indelibly upon her memory. There were times when she positively loathed him. There were others—for she was, as we know, a woman of generous instincts, easily moved to compassion—when she was drawn to him by strong pity. But all that came much later. To-night she regarded him merely as a very superfluous addition to her little party, as an unexplained, unaccounted-for sort of person, and consequently as a most undesirable cavalier for Mary Crookenden—a cavalier whom that self-willed and misleading young lady must be coerced or cajoled into dropping as soon as possible.

Immediately, however, Madame Jacobini perceived that Miss Crookenden displayed not the slightest intention of dropping him. For Mary had quite recovered her self-possession. She even found her late sensation of alarm ridiculous.

This man was very much as other men are, after all—an amiable, obedient geni, quite willing to carry superfluous garments and pilot you safely through a crowd; a bear, ready enough to dance to any tune a fair damsel might please to play to him. Mary embarked in pretty speeches, which gained a value and charm she was really

quite innocent of intending, from her smiling lips and the gentle gravity of her voice. She complimented Colthurst delicately, more by implication than direct assertion, upon his recently achieved renown.

'It must be a delicious sensation,' she said, 'to know that one has emerged; that one has done supremely well what so many try and fail to do.' The girl laughed a little, and her eyes had that glowing light in them. 'I can imagine nothing more inspiring, more satisfying than to have realized one's dreams, and made a great artistic success.'

They were standing on the steps leading down from the terrace. Before them the narrow alley, deserted, save for two dark figures—Madame Jacobini's and Mr. Carr's—on ahead, stretched out in long perspective. On one side of it a miniature stone-edged canal, spanned by lines of lanterns, on the other a bank of shrubbery dotted by coloured lamps. The interlacing shadows of the foliage played over the stone steps; the soft, tempered colours thrown by the lanterns stained the whiteness of Miss Crookenden's gown. The whole scene was fairy-like, unreal, provoking to the senses. Colthurst stopped, he could not resist doing so, and looked full at his companion. —'There is plenty of snow,' he thought, 'but I'm very much mistaken if there is not plenty of fire underneath the snow.'

Then he answered her rather floridly, trying to over-

come his stammer by speaking in that quick, whispering way of his.

'I am afraid success, like most other fine things, looks b-best at a distance, Miss Crookenden. You are thirsty for it; you see it ahead; you press on feverishly towards the great cool levels; you stoop down to plunge your hands in it, and you scoop up nothing but dry sand. Success is a mirage, which leaves you as thirsty as it found you in the end.'

'Ah, that is sad—sad,' Mary Crookenden said—'too sad to be quite true, surely!'

'You d-don't like what's sad?'

'Who does?' she asked, smiling again.

'Yes, I know.—And yet you had better try to like it, because the truth is always sad,' Colthurst said, quite gently. 'The great fundamental facts are not only sad, they are almost hideous. That is why nature tries to hide them under leaves and flowers, and glories of colour, and of light and shadow; and why we try to hide them under poetry and art. That is why, taking it at a lower level, we lay out gardens, make fountains play, light up lamps. In a common-place way even these trivialities help to hide the "accepted hells beneath," the ugly bases of our life—birth, death, and—well, you have read Schopenhauer, Miss Crookenden? You remember his anatomy of what we glorify under the name of love?'

But Miss Crookenden had not read Schopenhauer. She

said so promptly, and walked on down the steps; for it appeared to her this bear was beginning to dance to unexpected and rather discordant tunes.

'I can't believe that success is all mirage and dry sand,' she said.

'Oh, no! not quite all,' Colthurst answered. 'I don't care about going into society. But after having been less than nobody all your life, there is a certain pleasure in seeing your name in print, and in having countesses ask you to crushes—even if it is chiefly the pleasure of thinking your critics fools for their pains, and of refusing the fine ladies' invitations. Success obtains you these small gratifications. And then success brings money; and money is the one absolute good in life. You think it rather base to say so? That, probably, is because you have never known what it is to have to do without money, Miss Crookenden. Money sets you free—as far as freedom is p-possible. It enables you to go where you like, see what you like, do—within certain limits—what you like. You hardly measure all money can buy, perhaps.'

Colthurst had stopped again, and again he looked full at his companion. A little breeze swayed the spanning lines of lanterns. The frail, warm colours chased each other across the girl's white muslin dress. He could hear the silk lining of her bodice give a soft, creaking rustle as she breathed. The emotional side of his nature was very much in the ascendant, just then.

'And there are innumerable things I want to b-buy,' he went on, hesitating a good deal, 'and to d-do, and places I want to see. Do you know, Miss Crookenden, what it is to have nostalgia of the whole? To get mad to see all the world and the fashion of it? To make your *salut au monde*, in short.—There is no place I don't want to see—except P-Paris.'

'And why not Paris?' Mary asked, glad to be able to say something, for she was conscious of vague but growing discomfort as she listened.

Colthurst glanced at her sharply, queerly, for a moment

'I hate Paris,' he stammered. 'I should be extremely g-glad if fire and b-brimstone could be rained down out of heaven, or out of anywhere else for that matter, upon Paris. A little event of the sort would give me infinite satisfaction.'

A silence followed, an awkward one. Colthurst broke it rather harshly.

'However well my p-pictures may sell in the future,' though, I am afraid I shall not be able to afford celestial vengeance of that description,' he said. 'Heaven is impeccable, I am afraid, not to be bought. But—oh, well, short of that supreme indulgence, money may do a good deal for me. I want to go to the East. I want to see countries where men still treat each other worse than we treat our beasts. I want to see the ultimate possibilities of human degradation. I don't care about savages; they are stupid. I should like to see intelligence brought to

bear on the matter; and you can only have that under the conditions of an old civilization. The inside of a Chinese prison might suit me, I think, or the slave-market at Bagdad. I want to see Ceylon, too—colossal stone Buddhas sitting cross-legged upon the sacred lotus, in the dim heart of the tropic forest, the smile of completed and absolute impersonality upon their lips.'

As Colthurst talked thus his stammer lessened. The whole man seemed to expand, to grow taller, darker, more absorbed and absorbing. The smile of completed impersonality was very far indeed from being present on his lips. He shifted Miss Crookenden's cloak restlessly to his other arm. He gazed at her, dominated her, even as the geni the fisherman. Again the girl grew shy before the strange being she had let loose.

'I am afraid my cloak is in your way,' she said—as she felt, rather feebly—during a pause in this astonishing Oriental excursion.

'N-no, indeed it isn't the least in my way,' Colthurst asserted.

He waited a minute, looking at the light on the water of the canal. The ripples gave back a broken rainbow of colour upon a ground of liquid, luminous darkness. Colthurst put two fingers inside his turned-down shirt-collar, and wrenched it outward. He felt dangerously moved and excited.

'I wonder if one will ever get over this execrably bad

habit of caressing the idea of an utterly improbable future, instead of limiting one's desires to the possible and the present,' he said. 'These magnificent journeys of mine, for instance, lie in an entirely improbable future. A future when the general public shall have developed a desire for innumerable "James Colthursts"—you know that hateful way of speaking of a man's pictures?—to hang on the walls of its smug, suburban dining-rooms. I must wait until Hampstead, and Highgate, and Tooting, and the wilds of Clapham Common, and kindred abodes of the British Philistine cry aloud for possession of my work before I can reasonably hope to see Cingalese Buddhas or visit slave markets at Bagdad. And the British Philistine will never cry aloud for them. So it is a future past praying for.'

Colthurst turned to the young lady. The line was cut deep across his forehead. His expression was daring and humble at once. He tried to laugh, being a little ashamed of his own excitement; but he was not good at laughter, somehow. His merriment invariably had an infusion of bitterness in it.

'Still, you are right, Miss Crookenden. Even my small success is not all dry sand. It will buy me a Cook's tourist ticket to Switzerland and Italy. That is something, after all.'—He looked at the broken rainbow on the surface of the water again.—'For it is very good to lie among the gentians in an Alpine pasture, and see the

snow-peaks braving the sunshine. Or to sit on a vineyard wall, amongst the lizards, till you are baked through to the marrow. Or to drink a bottle of sour red wine in honour of Bacchus, at a wayside *osteria*, with the traditional "bush" above the open door. Or to see a stately matron, in faded pink and lilac garments, sitting at the corner o a deep, narrow, cut-throat street, the wall behind her ripe and rich with the greasy soil of ages, frying snails. Do you know that? It is delicious. The charcoal in the brazier gives out a dry, grating crackle, and the half-naked, brown-limbed children, with the faces of cherubim just descended from heaven, crowd round, staring at the flat iron pan of bubbling, hissing, sputtering shells.'

Mary made a little movement of disgust.

'Ah! that goes a step beyond the catholicity of your artistic instinct,' Colthurst said, quickly. 'Yes, it does require a very wide range of sympathy to appreciate the æsthetic qualities of snail-frying. B-but I wonder why I say all these things to you, Miss Crookenden! They must sound very unconventional, very mad. B-but then I wonder why we happened to meet—why you happened to come here to-night at all? I should not have thought this sort of show would have been to your taste any more—well, any more than the snails.'

Mary drew herself up. She did not like the personal flavour in this last speech.

'There are a certain number of hours in the day,' she

said, coldly. 'We came here simply to get rid of a few of the superfluous ones.'

She would have walked on after firing her little shot—walked on to rejoin Madame Jacobini. That lady had seated herself on a bench at the far end of the alley. Adolphus Carr stood in front of her. She was addressing him with much energy. Madame Jacobini could not help gesticulating. She found it irresistible to suit the word to the action, and the action to the word. Mary looked rather longingly in her direction, and took a few steps forward. But Colthurst's voice arrested her.

'Miss Crookenden,' he said, with a singular touch of authority, 'please don't play at cheap cynicism. I can't b-believe you have the smallest right to speak in that way—yet.'

The girl faced him proudly. She was wholly unaccustomed to such strictures upon the remarks she elected to make.

'Indeed,' she began. And then something in the man's face, some compelling force he seemed to exercise over her, made her check herself.—'I have no right to speak so,' she said, quite gently and gravely. 'It was an affectation. It was foolish.'

Colthurst looked down at the pale, green folds of the cloak upon his arm. His neat fingers arranged and re-arranged them with quick, deft movements.

'You may retort upon me that you wonder why I came

here to-night,' he said, stammering badly. 'For if you have been good enough to study at any work of mine you must know that this theatrical style of public festivity is not much in my line. I came here to-night not with any intention of juggling with my knowledge of the sadness and even hideousness that lie at the base of life. I did not come to be amused. I abhor what is called amusement. I came on a matter of business. I wanted to find a particular type which had struck me. I wanted to fix the impression of that type firmly in my mind. It was the merest chance I should find it again here. But the chance was just worth taking. If I did not find it here, I had determined to go to every place of public amusement in London, to the Park, the theatres, everywhere, until I did find it.'

Colthurst paused, raised his head, and looked fixedly at Mary Crookenden. There was a demand in that look. And Mary met the demand. Unwillingly, reluctantly, shrinking under a strong sense of repugnance—still she met it.

'And have you found what you were searching for here—the type, I mean?' she asked.

'Yes,' he said, 'I have found it. This evening has been a triumph for me in a small way.—I am not among the slavish believers in work from the model, you know. The model is all very well for the journeyman part of our business; but there are innumerable things you can never

learn from the model. All the most descriptive and delicate effects of gesture, many of the most dramatic revelations of character and emotion, are necessarily evanescent and transient. You must seize them in passing if you are to seize them at all. Therefore I have trained myself to work largely from memory. And so when, as in the case we were just speaking of, I see a type that attracts me, a face that—that holds an idea for me, action that interests me, I go after it. I do not let it evade me. I have a great deal of patience, but in the end I hunt it down. I possess myself of it.' Colthurst's handsome hands played oddly with the folds of the cloak. 'I possess myself of it,' he repeated. 'I know every line, every curve, every tone. I master it. I learn it by heart. It belongs to me. It can't elude me even if it would. It grows obedient. It comes when it is called.'

Oh! this bear danced to horrible tunes! This geni towered up to a height altogether giddy and terrific. Mary Crookenden was accustomed to discreet admiration and adulation. She was accustomed to rule her little kingdom according to her passing fancy. She was accustomed to being treated with high respect, consideration, indulgence; to being petted, humoured, given way to. She was accustomed to banish all that disturbed her or offended her taste. In her own circle of society she was privileged and precious. No one took even her name in vain. And now her little kingdom seemed to have dis-

appeared in chaos. A major force had swept down on it. Her privileges were disregarded. Her poor little throne was in ruins; the conventional props and supports of it had given way altogether. Her courtiers had forsaken her. She was all alone, face to face with a personality larger, stronger, more unrestrained, more dauntless than any she had ever encountered before. She was overcome by a panic of nervous fear.

Had Madame Jacobini and Mr. Carr been within earshot she would have called to them. But the bench was vacant; they were no longer in sight. She turned and glanced back. Her beautiful eyes were wide with misgiving and angry trouble, wet with something—notwithstanding her wilfulness and little airs of self-reliant grandeur—suspiciously akin to tears. The child, which lives in every true, pure-minded woman till far beyond the age Mary Crookenden had reached, gazed out of her face, simple, unaffected, terrified even, crying out dumbly but very eloquently for comfort, for protection and help.

Just then it happened that the monster fountain in the central basin rushed upward, a vast column of water, breaking, falling, dissipating itself in showers of golden light which irradiated the whole scene. It bathed the girl's fair face and figure as with the outburst of some strange sunset. She stood transfigured in the glow of soft unearthly light, her lips tremulous, her bright image doubled in the water at her feet.

Lancelot Crookenden and Aldham had just loitered down the steps from the terrace.

Colthurst stared at the girl in evident amazement. Then he glanced at the splendid young fellow coming lazily along the alley. He uttered a sharp exclamation. With a turn in the blood, which made him sick and faint for an instant, so that his muscles relaxed and the plush cloak fell in a heap on the gravel about his feet, he recognized them both; while the outward vision of illuminated exhibition gardens, electric lights, elaborate fountains, the hum and measured movement of the London crowd—all the artificial elements of his actual surroundings—gave place to an inward vision of a very different order.—He saw a steep heather-clad hill, sweeping upward to the cliff edge, the still blue waters of the autumn sea beyond; and, wrapped about with misty sunshine, their shadows lying long across the slope, a sturdy, smooth-faced school-boy, and a little orange and scarlet-clad maiden, pale-cheeked, red-eyed, the sweet evening wind tangling her long fair hair.

There were other human presences in that vision too; but on them Colthurst struggled not to let his remembrance dwell. Indeed, to him the vision was poignantly sad.

To most persons it is doubtfully cheering, I suppose, to meet themselves of five, seven, ten years ago. To Colthurst it was not doubtfully cheering, but quite undoubtedly ghastly, so to meet himself; to look in his own eyes; to

hear again his own voice; to dream again those boundlessly ambitious dreams; to have again that sense of leisure, of plenty of time ahead for fulfilment, which goes so far to give youth its enchanting buoyancy of spirit; to feel again that magnificent rage of living which belongs to the hopes and apprehensions of three-and-twenty. Ah! if he could but have wiped out those ten intervening years; wiped out not only the griefs and disillusionments, but even the ripening of talents, the success and renown they had brought him, and be back on that breezy hillside once again! He was torn with passionate longing, passionate regret. But unfortunately the road of life—it is a truism—is so constructed that there is no going back.

'Oh! Lance, Lance, I am so glad you have come!' cried Mary Crookenden. 'I want to find Sara Jacobini. Will you take me to find her? I want to go home.'

She moved close to him, childlike still in look and action, holding out her hands.

'Of course I'll take you,' he answered gladly, soothingly.

Then the goodly youth's manner suffered a singular change. He addressed himself to James Colthurst with a studied insolence, of which Mr. Aldham, for one, would have thought him wholly incapable.

'I will trouble you to give me my cousin's cloak. I see you've dropped it,' he said.

Colthurst stooped mechanically and picked it up. For

the moment his power of defiance, of self-assertion, was gone.

'I am much obliged to you,' Lancelot went on, curtly. 'Come, Polly; which way did they go?'

As Miss Crookenden walked away her alarm found expression in words. They were intended exclusively for her companion's ear, but the place was quiet and her grave voice carried.

'What an odious man!' she said. 'He is insufferable; he has no manners. And it is more than that—he is terrible, terrible.'

Lancelot stopped dead in the middle of the path.

'Why, the brute, what has he said? what has he done?' he demanded.

'Nothing—nothing in the world. Oh! my dear Lance, don't you become terrible too!' cried poor Mary. 'Nothing in the world. Do come. Let us find Sara Jacobini. He is only very extraordinary. Oh! pray don't say anything more about it. Really he did and said nothing one could describe, nothing one could take hold of. It is him, himself.'—Miss Crookenden put her hand through her cousin's arm.—'Come along, dear old boy,' she said. 'It's all right now I have found you. I am afraid I was not quite nice to you just now. Lance, you don't owe me one, do you? You forgive me?'

'Why, yes, of course, Polly,' the young man said, simply. 'Of course, I forgive you.'

And it appeared to Lancelot that the same sun as of old might, after all, rise to-morrow morning.

Mr. Aldham had stayed behind. He felt it due to himself that if other people lost their heads, he should give evident proof that his, at all events, remained quite in its right place on his shoulders. The little scene he had just witnessed appeared to him as precipitate as it was enigmatical. Miss Crookenden's bearing displeased him. It came near being undignified. But that only made him the more anxious to cover the abruptness of her retreat. He addressed a few civil words to Colthurst, expressing a hope that this, though their first, might not prove to be their last meeting. But, I am afraid, Mr. Aldham's attempts at cordiality were not calculated to carry conviction. He was preoccupied. His thin lips were more than usually compressed.

'We must arrive at an understanding—yes or no,' he was saying to himself, while he bade Colthurst good night. 'This state of uncertainty is not desirable for either of us. We must come to an understanding. We will do so in Switzerland.'

At that unnerving moment of recognition, as Miss Crookenden's cloak fell to the ground, her sketch-book had dropped out of the pocket of it. It lay now on the gravel at Colthurst's feet. No one but himself had observed it. He stood looking down at it. Should he call Aldham back and give it to him? That seemed an act of

humility, an act of service; and Colthurst was very far from inclined towards humility and acts of service just at present. Lancelot's manner, Miss Crookenden's parting words—he had heard them—cut him like a whip. His whole nature was in revolt. He was fiercely indignant with circumstance, chance, fate—either word does equally well and ill—for the very disconcerting practical joke she had played on him. He was indignant, too, with the woman who had been fate's main instrument in the playing of that joke. Why had she gone out of her way to cajole and flatter him? It was purely gratuitous on her part. He had only wanted to stare at her as at some beautiful work of art; and, of its own free-will, the picture had walked out of its frame, the statue stepped down from its pedestal. Smiling, gracious, altogether head-turning, it had approached him. Really it was not his fault, his doing. And then all that he most wished to forget had risen, spectral, sinister, accusing, behind the gracious figure; while the figure itself turned away, leaving him opposite that spectral background—turned away with something very like an insult on its lips.

'Odious, insufferable, mannerless,' Colthurst repeated to himself. 'A pretty list of epithets. I may as well claim the privileges of my disabilities.'

And he stooped down and picked up the sketch-book.

'It may be worth studying,' he said. 'Its contents may help to fix my impression of this particular type.'

BOOK III.—ST. MICHEL-LES-BAINS.

'Très volontiers,' repartit le démon. 'Vous aimez les tableaux changeans; je veux vous contenter.'—LE DIABLE BOITEUX.

CHAPTER I.

'BUT, my dearest Mary, I assure you it is nothing on earth but liver.'

The speaker, Madame Jacobini, sat up in her narrow wooden bed and delivered herself of this intimate announcement with much energy of conviction. Her skin was remarkably yellow, and offered a fine contrast to the grey woollen shawl thrown over her head. Madame Jacobini was one of those women who give themselves up to illness with positive generosity. She abandoned all artifice. She surrendered at discretion. She knew the grey woollen shawl made her look frightful. She did not care. Indeed, to look frightful under the circumstances was a sort of satisfaction.

Miss Crookenden, meanwhile, looking very much the reverse of frightful—though her beautiful eyes had a suggestive redness around them, which also slightly invaded her nose and chin—sat on the side of the bed.

This young lady was never more engaging, I think, than when in a sentimental humour. She contemplated her companion with an expression of the most artless distress. She sat there the image of delicate despair. Niobe, at two-and-twenty, in a particularly neat, dust-coloured, beige gown, with a full white silk waistcoat to it!

'You know, Sara,' she said, mournfully, 'if you have not complete confidence in that little French doctor—he looks dreadfully young, though he is so fat—I will telegraph to Baird directly, and tell him to come out.'

'What insanity!' cried Madame Jacobini.

'He could cross by the night boat, and be here to-morrow evening. And I should feel so much easier if he saw you.'

Miss Crookenden's breath caught in a really piteous way, while she furtively dabbed the small square of embroidered cambric she held in one hand against her eyes.

'And pray what fee do you suppose Baird would ask for stepping out here just to tell me to take blue pill?' inquired Madame Jacobini, not without irony.

'Oh! I'm sure I don't know. But what does money matter, Sara, when health is at stake? And I haven't been very extravagant this year. And Uncle Kent wrote and told me, just before we started—you remember?—some more had been paid in. And it wouldn't be possible to spend it better than in securing your comfort,

Sara, and—and perhaps saving your life.'—The picture conjured up by her last words so overcame Miss Crookenden that she began to cry in good earnest.—'It would be too horrible to think we hadn't done everything that we could; and if anything happened to you what should I do? oh! what should I do without you?'

'But, my precious child—for goodness' sake don't make yourself so unhappy, Mary.'—Madame Jacobini leaned forward, and possessed herself of one of the girl's pretty hands.—'It is liver, I tell you. Liver, liver, liver,' she repeated, in a rising scale of emphasis. 'Why, this attack is nothing! In old days I have sung at concerts—with Jacobini, poor dear creature, conducting too in a state of nervous irritability that was simply appalling—when I was so giddy the notes on my music sheet hopped up and down as if they were on wires. Everything turned addled-egg colour. The faces of the audience were like an enormous bed of autumn cabbages—every conceivable shade of green and yellow. And when I went back into the artistes' room I fainted dead away, and frightened the soprano nearly into fits. And yet did I die?' she added, with a little grimace. 'Not a bit of it. Depend upon it, Mary, we skinny scare-crows of women, with big mouths, are uncommonly tough. We take a lot of killing.'

Miss Crookenden could not help smiling. But she did so reluctantly.

'I don't believe in foreign doctors,' she remarked. 'They are so rough. They are not sympathetic, and they don't keep their nails clean—at least M. Baraty doesn't. He may give you all sorts of horrible wrong drugs——'

'Because his nails are dirty?' interrupted Madame Jacobini.

'No, of course not, but——'

'But nothing,' interrupted the elder lady again. 'In the long run he will give me just precisely what I tell him to give me. Why, that is what every sensible person calls in a doctor for—to confirm their own opinion, and prescribe the medicine they have a fancy to take. I know exactly what is the matter with me. The attack has been coming on for the last week. I must have got a chill the day we were at Thonon with your aunt and what you profanely call the Chosen People. Perhaps, dear Mrs. Crookenden's extreme coolness of demeanour gave me a chill—very possibly. Her neighbourhood is extremely suggestive of that of a large patent refrigerator. I was conscious of feeling quite poorly before the afternoon was over. But at the time I put it down to *le splecn*—active irritation induced by the manœuvrings of Lady Alicia Winterbotham in respect of poor Lancelot.'

Madame Jacobini looked hard at Miss Crookenden as she concluded those remarks. But the young lady remained, to all appearance, entirely indifferent.

'Violet Winterbotham is really very nice,' she said. 'She has a lovely mouth. She inherits that from her mother. All the Quayles have lovely mouths. Even Lady Louisa Barking, who is as "biled crow" unto me, a dish I pre-eminently don't "hanker after," has a lovely mouth.'

'Oh! has she?' exclaimed Madame Jacobini. She closed her eyes, and leaned back against the square, squashy pillows with a wide smile, followed by a yawn of proportional dimensions. Has she?' she repeated.

There was a silence of some duration. At last Miss Crookenden rose from her seat on the side of the bed. She shook herself gently, getting her dust-coloured skirts into place, stooped down and smoothed the bow on her left shoe, which was slightly crumpled.—'You really won't let me telegraph for Baird, then?' she asked.

'Good gracious, no!' cried Madame Jacobini, opening her eyes again. 'Certainly not. In a day or two I shall be perfectly well. If it was not for your being alone, I believe I should rather enjoy myself here. Bed is a blessed refuge. To get this unexpected holiday from dressing, and posing, and being agreeable, and making the best of oneself generally, as a self-respecting woman must—oh, it's a prodigious relief! But it really is annoying,' she continued, 'that I should be laid up just now, when the Frank Lorimers are gone. If Mrs. Frank had been here I could have laid in bed with an easy mind. But I don't in

the least like your having nobody but Chloe to look after you.'

'Chloe will look after you, not me, please, Sara. I have not the smallest intention of your being left to the tender mercies of that harumscarum French chambermaid.'

'But you can't sit in-doors all day, my dear child.'

'Of course not,' answered the other. 'I shall go out. I shall walk. I shall sketch. I shall be very independent. It will be extremely amusing.'

'But, my dear, you can't go wandering about alone here. To begin with you would feel very uncomfortable, not having an idea how to take care of yourself. And to go on with, we should have half the young men in St. Michel-les-Bains dangling after you, with Mr. Aldham at their head.'

Mary drew herself up.

'Mr. Aldham is not the sort of person who dangles,' she observed, laying a contemptuous stress on the final word.

'No; I must own, I don't believe he is,' the elder woman responded, quickly.—Her indomitable honesty frequently compelled her to eat up her own words thus. She closed her eyes again, and folded her thin hands on the sheet.—'I don't care very ardently about him, you know, Mary. Those very priestly young gentlemen make me a trifle nervous. I can hardly believe the greater part of their saintliness doesn't take off with their long black coats.'

'When we saw Mr. Aldham yesterday he was in flannels,' put in Miss Crookenden.

'Only part of him. It was an ingenious compromise between the world and the Church. Remember that hideous stock and the high black waistcoat. The yoke was still about his neck.'—Madame Jacobini yawned again. —'No,' she went on; 'they do seem to me rather unnatural. A man should not be too obviously good. It is an infringement of our rights, and reverses the proper position of men and women. The woman ought always to be the better of the two. It appears to me that is just what she is made for. And then these young clergymen generally end by going over to Rome—they are Jesuits at heart, every man Jack of them!'

'I am sure Mr. Aldham is not a Jesuit at heart,' said Miss Crookenden.

'And I have often remarked,' Madame Jacobini continued, relentlessly, 'that these super-excellent, saintly people, who are always cracking up asceticism and self-denial, and who give one the impression they are only fit to associate with the angels, and have consequently the right to be slightly contemptuous towards us lay wretches with all our solicitude over marrying and giving in marriage, usually end by having not only a wife but an enormous family themselves.'

'Really, Sara, I don't think we need go into that,' Mary exclaimed.

A little struggle took place in her between offence and affection. She wished Sara would not say what was

inconvenient. She wished particularly she would not do so when she was ill, and it was consequently impossible to be comfortably offended with her. It seemed like taking an unfair advantage of the situation.—'If you are sure you don't want me, I think I'll go out for a walk,' she said, abruptly. She moved away to the door.

Madame Jacobini lay watching the girl, shading her eyes with one hand. Her bright, plain face wore an expression of rather puzzled amusement.

'Mary,' she called out suddenly, 'I am a disgusting coward.'

Miss Crookenden looked back, her hand on the door handle.

'Really!' she said. 'Then you know yourself better than I know you.'

Madame Jacobini made a little grimace.

'Don't be angry, my dear; and come here, please. I want to speak to you. I have had something on my mind for the last three weeks, and it has helped to make me bilious. I knew I ought to admonish you. What do you keep me for, except to admonish you now and again? And I have not had the moral courage to speak out and have done with it.'

Mary, carrying her head rather high, came slowly back across the shining parquet floor, and stood at the bottom of the bed.

'If you are going to tell me something disagreeable, pray tell it me at once,' she said, calmly.

Madame Jacobini laughed a little.

'You are inimitable,' she exclaimed. 'Yes, it is disagreeable, and we had better get it over as quickly as may be.—My dear, then, do you know you are rather cruel to that unhappy young Jesuit? One day you are mild, and deferential, full of appropriate enthusiasm, and those pretty eyes of yours look unutterable things. The poor creature treads on air. Next day you are as proud as Lucifer—give him the cold shoulder in the most open and ostentatious way. He sinks beneath a sea of lead—or would do so if his self-esteem didn't act cork-jacket and keep him afloat. Now, I hold that flirting, in moderation, is as natural at one time of life as measles at another. All the same I do not think it is quite right to go on first blowing hot and then cold, in this way. You know my opinion of him. He is altogether too irreproachable for my taste. Still, fair play's a jewel, Mary, and no woman, if a man is genuinely in love with her, ought to tease him as naughty children do a mouse with a string to its leg; do you think she ought?'

Miss Crookenden gave a little shudder.

'Was that pity for the mouse or the man?' asked Madame Jacobini, quickly.

'Oh! the mouse,' the young lady answered. 'I wish you would not make use of such illustrations, Sara. I can't bear to think of creatures being hurt.'

'I don't dictate; I don't even advise; I only state the

case,' Madame Jacobini said, spreading out her hands. 'If you don't intend to accept him, don't let him propose. With a little honest effort you can easily show him that won't do. If you do intend to accept him, don't plague him. He is not all sweetness and light. He has a long memory. He is one of those immaculate persons whom it is particularly unwise to irritate.'

Miss Crookenden's lofty demeanour had suffered considerable modification during the progress of this conversation. She came round to the bed-side, straightened out the edge of the sheet, and administered sundry pokes to the squashy pillows, bending down meanwhile over her friend. 'Sara, do you think I have behaved very badly?' she asked.

'I think you had better know your own mind.'

'But my mind changes,' said Miss Crookenden, plaintively.

Madame Jacobini smiled, and patted her cheek. 'You must not let it change, my dear. You can be obstinate enough, you know, when you like.'

The girl wiped her eyes, laughing rather tremulously.

'Oh! hang all the lovers,' she said. 'I don't want them. Why, in the name of all that's tiresome, should they want me? I want to be a delightful little old maid like Miss Aldham, and paint great pictures.'

'What a logical combination of desires!' cried Madame Jacobini. 'If you are a delightful little old maid like Miss Aldham, most decidedly you will never paint great

pictures. And if you ever paint great pictures, you will very certainly not end as an old maid of Miss Aldham's pattern. Extremes meet, but not extremes of that sort. The two things are incompatible. To one or other you must wave a long farewell, my dear.'

'But you don't really think you are dangerously ill, Sara?'

'Good gracious, no! of course not.'

Mary wiped her eyes again, hastily.

'I feel foolish,' she said. 'I will go out for a walk.'

When Madame Jacobini was alone she shut her eyes, while her thin, nervous fingers performed a rapid fantasia on the smooth space of the turned-down sheet.

'Dear me,' she said, 'what a hatefully head-achey thing it is to do one's duty! I wish that good youth was at Jericho, high waistcoat, angelic face, and all the rest of it. And then, in addition, to-night our poor, devoted Lancelot arrives here.'

Chapter II.

Behind, like an indented coast-line, running out in cape and headland, sweeping back in inlet and bay, the edge of the pine woods. Below, at the bottom of the great cup formed by the surrounding hills, St. Michel-les-Bains, looking from this over-hanging height like a child's toy town set out on a green table-cloth. Peeping over the farther rim of the cup, above a range of pink-grey crags,

like the white-headed frost giants of Scandinavian legend, out-lying pinnacles and spires of Mont Blanc. All around, the grass of the Alpine pasture splashed with flowers, across which flights of swallow-tail butterflies—vigorous, broad-winged, triumphant creatures, clothed in splendour of iridescent purple and pale gold—chased each other, and whirled upward, in wild Bacchic dance or riotous courtship, high in mid-air.

The sun was so hot that Colthurst, lying on the grass, could feel exactly where the shifting shadow of the pines behind him ended, as the sunshine began to creep up towards his knees. He was just pleasantly tired. For the last three days he had been tramping through the fine country lying south and west of the Rhone Valley. The two lads, who acted as guides and carried his and his companion's modest baggage, had disappeared down the zig-zag path, bordered by barberry bushes thick with scarlet fruit, leading to St. Michel. They shouted, and sang, and yodelled as they ran, stumbling down the sharp descent. Their loud, open-throated music was not supremely harmonious, perhaps; but there was an untamed gaiety in it, born of strong exertion and the freedom and enchantment of these mountain pastures, which Colthurst found very inspiring, as it came to him on the eager breeze that played upon his face and then washed away through the branches of the innumerable pine-trees behind him.

Colthurst was taking a holiday. He had been idle for

three weeks. This was the first three weeks' idleness, save the dreary, enforced idleness of illness, he had known since he was quite a small boy. I do not say his holiday had been a period of uninterrupted bliss; but, on the whole, pleasures had far exceeded annoyances during the course of it. The latter had been petty, the former solid, and Colthurst felt well. That small word holds a vast amount of meaning for some of us. Colthurst was among the unfortunates who have sounded the greatness of its meaning. His nerves had grown steady; his vexatious inclination to stammer had, consequently, lessened for the time. The rage of living possessed him in all its delicious fierceness as he lay on the warm grass of the green alp, among the gentians, and salvias, and queer, tall, toad-coloured mountain thistles. His brain was quick with thoughts. He had a great determination of words to the mouth. In short, Colthurst, according to his own fashion, was happy. He was ready to go forward along the road of life, not regretfully desperate to go back.

'Don't talk to me about beauty as if it was a thing by itself, a quantity measurable, ponderable, producible or removable at will,' he was saying, 'as if it could be laid on, as a cabinet-maker lays on a veneer of precious wood over a plain deal surface; as if it could be bought and sold, taken hold of, carried about; as if you could put your finger on it and say, Here it is; or on the absence of it, and say, Here it is not. That is a horribly gross,

carnal conception of it. Beauty is a spirit, and they that worship it must worship it in spirit and in truth—specially in truth, not in shams, and delusions, and pretences, and fashions, and affectations, which are precisely that in which the majority always have worshipped it, and always will worship it, I suppose, human nature being what it is, protest as one may. Beauty is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and yet it is always changing, shifting, showing you a fresh face, revealing itself anew. It is endlessly stable and endlessly fertile. It informs all things, and yet, in a sense, is nothing. You apprehend it more with your intellect than with your eyes. And that is what English people persistently refuse to understand. They are ruining their stage, as they have already ruined their picture-galleries, by the besotted belief that intellect has nothing to do with it; that beauty—which is only another word for art—begins and ends with an appeal to the eyes. We English plume ourselves on our respectability and decency, on avoiding the quagmire of sensuousness into which other nations fall. Only look at the walls of our exhibitions, look at the *mise-en-scène* of our theatres! I declare I believe we are the most sensuous nation on the face of the earth. The appeal is always to the eye, and to what are called the domestic affections. And the domestic affections are the biggest shams out. Legalized sensuousness—that is what the domestic affections amount to if you run them to earth.'

Colthurst delivered himself of this tirade with much vehemence, leaning on his elbow, pulling now and again, in a neatly violent sort of way, at some long jointed grasses growing near him—biting at the white, soft stems when he had wrenched them from their envelope, and then flinging away the feathery heads of flower.

Mr. Barwell, assistant-master of the Connop Trust Art School, sitting beside him—his spare, Don Quixote-like frame doubled together, his hands clasped about his knees—listened in silent wonder. He was conscious of receiving a series of small electric shocks during the course of the conversation of which the above is a fragment. Ever since he had first encountered James Colthurst, at the hotel at Aigle, about a week ago, a sense of almost reckless adventure had been upon him. He had lived in a condition of repressed excitement, which, in combination with the flies—they abound in the Rhone Valley—had seriously broken his rest of a night. This estimable man, of over fifty, was as fluttered, as anxiously, doubtfully jubilant, as a small schoolboy out of bounds, at finding himself in the company of the rising painter.

Mr. Barwell had a tall narrow head, with no particular back to it; a nose which his friends and he himself called aquiline, but which his enemies—had he possessed any, which I cannot believe he did, being the most invincibly inoffensive of men—would probably have likened to the beak of the parrot rather than that of the eagle; and a

large amount of sparse, wavy, grey-white whisker. It may be added that he belonged to that charming order of persons—to be found, let it be said, to the honour of humanity, in all departments of art—who, with admirable self-abnegation, are willing to play not second, but twenty-second fiddle, if needs be, to their more illustrious brother artists all their lives long—the John Baptists of every-day life, for ever pointing the crowd to one greater than themselves, whose way they prepare without a trace of envy.

Mr. Barwell had an unlimited reverence for genius. It awed and, in a sense, intoxicated him. Genius might exhibit itself under many different forms. Between these forms he did not aspire to discriminate, with any rash placing of higher and lower, on the strength of his own private judgment. He had, of course, heard James Colthurst's work much discussed, during the last few months, by people interested in artistic questions. He had even had the privilege of hearing the well-known Royal Academician who presided over the Connop Trust School deliver judgment on the subject.

'He is an innovator,' that gentleman had said, 'and regards many of our cherished traditions very irreverently. I consider his principles, so far as I can pretend to apprehend them, as erroneous, distinctly erroneous. But he is clever, undeniably—I had almost said diabolically clever.' And the great man had ended up with a laugh, half apologetic, half patronizing.

This speech had recurred frequently to Mr. Barwell's mind during the past week. Erroneous in principle, yet diabolically clever.—It appeared to him his *chef* had hit off Colthurst exactly. This delighted him. It gave him another opportunity of bowing down before the greatness of the said *chef*. It also gave him a convenient phrase behind which to shelter when Colthurst's talk alarmed him by the agitating reforms it proposed, or the exhaustingly wide horizons it opened out. Mr. Barwell fortified himself with the remembrance that his principles were erroneous, and therefore what he said really did not very much matter. When the magnetism of Colthurst's strong personality, his force and ability, took him by storm and absolutely prostrated him with admiration, he consoled himself for his apparent weakness by remembering that his own particular Royal Academician, the head of his beloved Connop Trust School, had, after all, admitted that this iconoclastic young painter was diabolically clever. The phrase was a support to him now, as he sat on the fragrant grass of the green alp, watching the darting butterflies. Again, it proved a most convenient shelter. He ran in behind it, and took breath, so to speak, whenever a pause occurred in the cannonade of Colthurst's conversation.

The cannonade began again very soon, however, breaking out in rather a new place.

'Beauty lies far deeper than most people are willing to

suppose. It consists in the true relation of things to themselves. Everything natural is beautiful.'

'Oh, dear! oh, dear!' murmured Mr. Barwell, mildly, under his breath.

He clasped his knees still tighter with his hands; and, by raising his feet tip-toe and then dropping his heels to the ground again, communicated a gentle see-saw motion to his doubled up person. He really had to let off steam somehow.

'Yes, it is,' Colthurst asserted. 'Every action, expression, aspect, rightly understood, is beautiful, in as far as it is spontaneous and according to nature. And by that I don't only mean nature groomed, and rubbed down, and in magnificent condition, like a prize animal at a show. I am not going back to any mythic golden age for my beauty—not to impossible gods and goddesses in marble.'

'You acknowledge the antique as the basis of instruction, surely?' gasped Mr. Barwell.

'No, not as the basis—most emphatically not as the basis. That is getting hold of quite the wrong end of the stick. Work towards perfection, if you like—if you can—if perfection exists. But to begin with it and work back from it is a self-evident mistake, I should say, contrary to all known laws of development. By setting your students down opposite to those faultless marble impossibilities you create a false standard in their minds. Nature does not come up to that standard; consequently, when you show them nature, they despise her. *Le mieux est*

l'ennemi du bien. Nature is the good; it is an impiety, as well as a stupidity, to discredit her by filling your students minds with dreams of a non-existent better. The very best life model you can get looks defective after the Apollos, and Venuses, and all those other ill-conducted classic divinities whom it is customary to make such free use of in the education of English youth. The final measure must always be Nature. Why not send your students to her at once? Why use lies, in short, as a preface to the truth? And why be afraid to take the truth as a whole?—I find Nature is full of imperfection, failure, pain, of irony, and of humour of a very broad literal kind.

'Well, I accept her unhappy and malign aspects as just as true as her happy and benign ones. After a tremendous struggle, we have come to understand, thanks chiefly to Turner and Constable—some of the younger men are beginning already to forget or ignore the lesson, though, I am afraid—that rain, and storm, and cloud are at least as beautiful as clear sky and sunshine, the elements at war as beautiful as the elements at peace. Well, I want to carry that understanding farther and deeper. I want to show that, if intelligently looked at, poverty, disease, sorrow, decay, death, sin—yes, I am not much afraid of the word—are ideally beautiful too, paintable too, intrinsically and enduringly poetic.'

Mr. Barwell see-sawed in a kind of mild desperation. He was terrified and yet fascinated.

'Oh, dear! oh, dear!' he said again; 'but this is revolutionary, Mr. Colthurst. Where would not such views lead to? They are revolutionary, positively revolutionary.'

Colthurst threw away a bitten grass stem, pushed his moustache up from his lip, while a curiously fanatical gleam came into his eyes.

'And why not?' he asked. 'Has it never occurred to you what a lovely thing revolution is—*La Révolution*—she, the person, the spirit, the beast, perhaps—I am not sure which—who wipes off the dust, and makes the rusty wheels turn again, and sweeps away dead ideas, and brings forth living ones; that persistent enemy of stagnation, without whose broom and dust-pan human affairs would be smothered by refuse and cobwebs and eaten out by dry-rot? I don't paint allegorical pictures, you know; but if I were ever deluded enough to attempt one, I would try to put Revolution worthily on canvas, in her blood-red robe, holding a scourge in her hand. She is a divinity much more to my taste than smirking, marble Apollos, or even Raffaelesque Madonnas, dressed, parrot-like, in half the colours of the rainbow.'

The assistant master of the Connop Trust School could not help it, he groaned as he sat in the shadow of the pines, among the gentians, and salvias, and swallow-tail butterflies. Faust, before his transformation, must have suffered just such very upsetting moments whilst listening to Mephistopheles' surprising suggestions in the philoso-

phy of life. Had he not, indeed, possessed the Royal Academician's consolatory phrase to shelter behind during the pauses, I fear the good man would hardly have been able to retain any degree of mental or moral equilibrium at all.

Humour, fortunately, entirely refuses to run in couples with tall-talk. The groan amused Colthurst, and his sense of the slight absurdity of the situation steadied him. Deference and admiration were new and very pleasant to him, particularly when they came from men older than himself. The lionizing to which certain circles of society had subjected him during the past three months had been far from agreeable to him. But for your lionship to be attended by one faithful and profoundly impressed jackal is a totally different thing from your lionship being stared at by a crowd of the professional sight-seers of whom society is so largely composed. Colthurst liked his jackal —was flattered, touched even, by the creature's attentions. He would have regretted extremely driving it away by the loudness of his roaring—though, I am afraid, he dearly liked roaring too, and that loudly. He took up his parable again, therefore, in an altogether humbler and less aggressive strain.

'It is all very well for me to talk about Revolution,' he said; 'but I shall never make one. That is emphatically a game it takes two to play at—a public to listen and follow, as well as leaders to show the way. In the present case there is no public ready to listen—except for a

minute or two, out of passing curiosity—still less ready to follow. The public only listens willingly to those who prophesy smooth things, who coax and cosset it, and assure it that its worship of the domestic affections is the last word of ethics, and religion, and art. The very last thing the public desires is to be asked to use its brains, or to have the stability of its favourite idols called in question. It is the fashion to look at my pictures just now; so the public pays its shilling and goes and looks at them. But what does it make of them? Nothing. Empty it comes. Empty it goes away.'

Colthurst raised himself into a sitting position, resting his hands on the grass on either side of him.

'Oh! it is sickening,' he exclaimed. 'Sometimes it makes me laugh, sometimes it makes me mad, when I think how miserably little my pictures mean to other people, as compared with what they mean to me.'

'No doubt,' Mr. Barwell said, relieved at being able to agree for once. 'But that I suppose is the fate of every artist, in a degree. And yet I think you rather underestimate the intelligence of the public, Mr. Colthurst, if you will pardon my saying so. In regard to "The Road to Ruin," for instance, I don't say the public has grasped your meaning to the full, still——'

'"The Road to Ruin"!' Colthurst broke in, glancing sharply, suspiciously at his companion. —But the expression of that gentleman's countenance was guileless, civil, en-

tirely sincere.—'You are quite r-right,' he went on, stammering badly all of a sudden, whispering his words quickly to get them said at all. 'The p-public, even allowing that I under-estimate its intelligence, certainly has not grasped all my meaning. It would have been considerably astonished and frightened if it had. The p-picture meant very much to me. It meant nothing less than salvation or d-damnation. First one, then the other. Now it m-means—why—good Lord!——'

Colthurst sprang to his feet with—so it seemed to much-perturbed Mr. Barwell—a kind of silent black flash, and then stood curiously still.

Out of the pine-wood on the left comes the bridle-path leading down to St. Michel-les-Bains. For a couple of hundred yards it skirts the edge of the pasture, and then turns abruptly down over the hill-side, among the barberry bushes. Along this path came Miss Crookenden and Cyprian Aldham. They were talking, talking too earnestly to be sensible of the presence of the two spectators on the other side of the pasture, in the shadow of the pines. Half-way along the path Mary Crookenden stopped, and stood holding her hat on with one hand, her graceful figure—outlined against the vast panorama of distant hill-side, mountain, and crag—distinct and bright in the strong sunshine. Aldham—Colthurst knew him again, notwithstanding his flannels—waited beside her. He was talking still. Apparently what he said did not quite meet with

Miss Crookenden's approval. She turned away, and walked on along the path. Then at the top of the hill it would seem she repented. She paused among the scarlet-fruited, barberry bushes, making a pretty picture in her light gown and big white hat. Aldham rejoined her. Together they disappeared down the steep descent.

Colthurst's hand had clutched at something in the breast pocket of his jacket. He kept it there as he sat down on the grass again.

'That young lady and gentleman are spending a very agreeable morning, I fancy,' Mr. Barwell remarked, with a touch of gentle irony.

The good man liked to see lovers. He affected to smile at their follies. He really envied them their follies not a little. Two lean, high-nosed Miss Barwells, in a small semi-detached villa at Hampstead, whose united incomes did not exceed seventy pounds a year, had rendered, and would continue to render, love and marriage impossible for him. So Mr. Barwell contented himself with the labours of the Connop Trust School, and admiration of the works and ways of his own particular Royal Academician. He civilly but firmly, these many years, had requested sentiment to keep her distance. But sentiment was not always as obligingly obedient as she might have been. On the present occasion she gave a drag at the excellent under-master's heart-strings, which caused him more than one twinge of delicate pain. And somehow

those twinges of pain made him regain his self-possession. Colthurst's strange, violent personality ceased to dominate him. Mr. Barwell made a return upon himself. He voluntarily took off the distorting, exaggerating, monster-revealing spectacles through which the younger man had insisted upon his looking at the universe; and regarded it once more, just simply and naturally, with his own kindly, modest eyes—eyes focussed to see the good and be dim to the evil; focussed to accept anomalies; focussed not to peer too deep or perceive too clearly, or range in vision too far. It is no mean happiness to be seated in the mean, says the maxim. All excess brings sorrow and disaster; even excess of talent, even excess of truth itself.

And yet I venture to doubt whether Mr. Barwell's return upon himself was voluntary, after all; whether Colthurst had not unconsciously withdrawn his influence, rather than Mr. Barwell consciously emancipated himself from that influence.

'Now it m-means b-both,' Colthurst repeated to himself, finishing off his broken sentence, his eyes fixed on the spot where the path turns so abruptly down over the hill-side—'both, both—as you look at it from one side or the other, heaven or hell.' He put his fingers inside his shirt-collar, and wrenched it outward.—'Don't you think it is about time we went on to St. Michel, and got some food,' he asked, 'and found out what those shouting boys have done with our luggage?'

Chapter III.

Miss Crookenden came in very late for luncheon. At the stair-head of the Hôtel et Pension Chabaud the statuesque coloured woman, her dusky, splay-featured countenance sharpened by anxiety, stood waiting to receive her.

'De Lord be praised for de sight of you, Miss Mary, darlin'!' she broke out, volubly. 'Where you bin gone dis long time all alone? Poor Auntie Chloe's looked out of de window, up de street and down de street, till her ole eyes were smarting with watching for you.'

'Oh, I lost my way, and have wandered out of the old world into a new one since I left you this morning,' Miss Crookenden answered, pulling off her hat and gloves and giving them to her nurse. 'I had no end of bother in finding my way home again.'—The girl's smile was rather wan. She went languidly along the wide passage and into her own room. She sat down on the nearest chair.—'In fact, I'm not quite sure I have found my way home even now. Take off my boots, auntie, if you love me, this very minute. How's Madame Jacobini?'

'Oh, she's doin' well enough!'

The ex-slave's allegiance to her young mistress's duenna was of a mitigated and intermittent description. She possessed the high respect for social standing common to her race. 'Ma'am Jacobini only a music-teacher,' she

would mumble to herself with a fine flavour of contempt, whenever that lady happened to displease her, or when—as on the present occasion—Miss Crookenden's affectionate solicitude aroused her jealousy. Now, as she squatted on the floor, unlacing the girl's boots, she grumbled out—'I'm thinking Ma'am Jacobini 'll be 'bliged to find servants of her own to tend her if she's gwine to keep her bed. Chloe's not gwine to 'low de chile she loves better'n anything else in de length and breadth of dis sinful ole earth to go wandering around alone, and coming in looking as white as de snow on de top of de mountains. You've just bin and tired yourself to death, honey.'

Miss Crookenden leaned back in her chair, her hands hanging by her sides, her pretty feet reposing in the old woman's lap, and answered in the same tone of rather melancholy playfulness—'You see it is a very long journey from one world to another between ten o'clock and two, auntie. I am bound to be tired after it, and to feel a little limp. But I shall not take such a journey again for seven whole months,' she added. 'Think of that, auntie—not for seven whole months.'

'De chile's light-headed,' murmured the old woman, peering up over the rim of her spectacles.

'No, the child is only a little heavy-hearted. My patience, me, Chloe,' cried Miss Crookenden, with a sudden revival of animation, 'what a monstrously troublesome world it is!'

Chloe's patient, animal-like eyes gazed up in doting, questioning fondness. Then she fell to rubbing the soles of the girl's feet as she held them in her large brown hands.

'It oftens 'pears to me,' she said, musingly, 'de best prayer for all of us, de young as well as de aged, is for de Lord to please to make up de number of His elect and hasten His coming. Dat's de only sartin cure for de troubles of dis yeah world, Miss Mary, darling. I 'low de judgment-day 'll be de brightest day dat ever dawned for a mighty 'mount of folks down yeah.'—The rubbing ceased abruptly.—'Why, if der isn't a little hole in de toe of your stocking, honey!'

'There must be holes in somebody's stockings,' Miss Crookenden rejoined, in a tone of somewhat discouraged philosophy.

'But not in yours,' the old woman said, with decision. 'Let Chloe put you on another pair, and get you your white silk wrapper, and you lie down on de sofa and eat de leastes little bit of chicken, and go to sleep till tea-time.'

These suggestions were not, it must be owned, wholly unattractive to the young lady. The 'leastes little bit of chicken,' followed by slumber, appealed to her as a more feasible and less agitating remedy for her present exhaustion than its apparent alternative—a hurrying on of the Day of Judgment.

'But Madame Jacobini?' she said.

'Never you trouble about her. She's doin' well enough. De doctor said she was to be kep' quiet.'

The old woman spoke crossly. It was evident that she, anyhow, entertained no fears regarding the invalid's eventual restoration to her usual health and vivacity.

The Hôtel et Pension Chabaud must have formerly been a country house of considerable pretensions. It stands in a large garden on the outskirts of the pretty, warm, yellow-and-white Savoy town. Tradition, indeed, reports that it has the honour of occupying the site of a Roman villa. For, notwithstanding its distinctly Christian name, St. Michel-les-Bains has an aroma of classic antiquity hanging about it. It possesses a Roman arch, a good deal the worse for wear, as any one visiting the public park can testify. An ambitious local archæologist is under the glad impression, moreover, that he has discovered traces of a temple, probably of Mercury, in the stable-yard of M. Garin, *diligence* proprietor. While the indications of Roman baths are so incontestable, that the visitors to the *Etablissement Thermal*, when standing mournfully before their tall glasses of really terrible mineral water, may support themselves with the thought that they are not alone in their misery. Gentlemen in togas, and ladies in flowing robes and sandals, nearly two thousand years ago, stood dismally as they are standing, hesitated, gulped, retched, even as they do; and no doubt agreed that this liquid horror must

be extremely efficacious, since it is so unspeakably nasty.

Miss Crookenden's sleep did her good. At five o'clock she had a little tea-party under a large mulberry-tree in the garden aforesaid. It was really hot. Caterpillars let themselves down by silken threads into the milk-jug, and wasps invaded the honey-pot. Yet the tea-party was pleasant. Lancelot Crookenden had arrived. His cousin was, perhaps, a little surprised at her own gladness at his advent.

He drove up in a small one-horse carriage, of dimensions distinctly inadequate to the length of his legs, side by side with Simond Caillet, the guide—the latter smoking a long black pipe with imperturbable composure and holding a couple of ice-axes across his knees.

St. Michel is not much in touch with the more serious side of Alpine experience. The arrival of this handsome young Englishman, just back, so said the gossips, from a series of *grandes ascensions*, threw the hotel into a flutter of excitement. The *concierge* let down the steps of the little carriage with a flourish, as though receiving royalty. Madame Chabaud herself, neat, plump, active, outwardly soft as silk, inwardly—save where the three-year-old son and heir of the house of Chabaud was concerned—harder than the nether millstone, appeared in the doorway, heading a numerous contingent of servants. A German-Swiss family, large alike in numbers and in personal proportions,

leaned out over a balcony on the first floor to see the show. A shrill-voiced American child called out to its faded-looking mother, 'Oh, my, mammah! ain't his face a colour!' in perfectly audible accents. And some English girls, in ill-fitting 'shirts' and short petticoats, stopped in the middle of their game of lawn-tennis with the mystic words 'Two, love,' on their lips. St. Michel did not produce many lawn-tennis-playing young men. They saw at a glance this young man must play lawn-tennis magnificently. But would he play it with them? Hope springs eternal in the human breast. Perhaps he might. They darted and skipped over the coarse sun-scorched grass on either side the net with renewed vigour.

Miss Crookenden was in a slightly sentimental humour. She lent herself graciously to the enthusiasm of the moment. And then it was undeniable that Lancelot looked very gallant in his slouched hat and rough mountaineering garments, fumbling in his pockets for a most unnecessary amount of coin—he had a natural instinct for over-paying—as he stood beside the little carriage.

'Good-bye, Simond,' he said to the guide. 'Take good care of yourself till I come back again. Give my kind regards to your wife and those jolly children when you get home. I am awfully sorry this is our only job together for this season.'—He took off his hat with a politeness which moved even the nether-millstone heart of Madame Chabaud. She felt such a young gentleman would confer

splendour on her establishment. She thanked Heaven he had not gone to the Hôtel des Comtes de Savoie, in the market-place. It would have poisoned her with envy. —'I believe you expect me,' he said. 'My name's Crookenden. I believe some ladies who are staying here have kindly engaged a room for me.'

And then all Lancelot's soul leapt into his quiet eyes, for over the landlady's plump shoulders, farther back in the dimness of the hall, he perceived Mary Crookenden, wonderfully fair and distinct, stately even, it seemed to him, among this common-place company.

'Yes, everything is settled, Lance,' the young lady said. 'Madame Chabaud knows; don't you, Madame Chabaud?'

'*Parfaitement, mam'selle.*' Then, sharply,—'*Pierre, montez les bagages de monsieur au numero vingt-deux.*'

'It's awfully good of you, Polly, to come and meet me,' Lancelot said. He followed his cousin out into the garden.

'How could I help coming to claim relationship with my illustrious cousin before all the admiring throng? It's not every day we have a chance of welcoming a hero, you know, Lance, in our family. Come over there into the shade. Chloe has ordered tea for us—out of doors, under a tree, for a treat, as if we were two good little children in pinafores.'

To Lancelot's ears his cousin's gaiety did not ring quite true. Now he saw her in the light, it struck him she was

not looking well. She was 'all eyes,' as the nursery phrase runs.

'*Mon Dieu, quel adorable jeune homme!*' murmured a French lady of an emotional order of mind, as the cousins passed the rustic seat on which she reposed, supported by a wicked-looking black poodle and yellow-covered novel. '*Il ressemble à ces amours de gladiateurs qui s'égorgent les uns les autres dans le grand tableau de Léon Veyrier, au Salon.*'

The English girls also made their comment.—'Oh! he belongs to her, then!' laying great stress on the second pronoun. They began to handle their racquets in a dispirited fashion. However well the new-comer might play lawn-tennis, they entertained a sad conviction he was not at all likely to play it with them on the present occasion.

'I've had a splendid trip,' Lancelot said, as he munched the crisp rolls. 'What an awfully nice mulberry-tree! It's like an enormous umbrella. Do you often have your tea out here, like this, Polly?—I wish I could have come for longer, but my mother made rather a worry, don't you know, of my going away from Thonon at all. She said it broke up the party. But, you know, between ourselves, it was rather slow at Thonon. There was literally nothing to do. And really they were such a pack of women. I don't want to be rude, but there were—three, four, six of them—to Winterbotham and me. And that is a little severe, you know.'

'I think Violet Winterbotham very pretty,' said Miss Crookenden, with a certain decision.

'Oh! I dare say. Everybody says so, and so of course she must be. There's a fly in your tea-cup; let me fish him out, Polly. I'm so sorry Madame Jacobini's seedy. Is Aldham still here?'

'He goes to-morrow,' Miss Crookenden said, bending her head to watch the fly slowly cleaning off drops of sugary tea as it staggered over the table-cloth. 'Tell me some more about your mountaineering, Lance.'

'Oh, it was first-rate!' he replied.—It may be noted, in passing, that the news of his friend, Cyprian Aldham's impending departure by no means depressed Lancelot. He bore up under it remarkably well.—'I wish I could take you up a big mountain some day, Polly,' he went on. 'You would like it. You'd make a lot out of it. It's too splendid up there, with the miles of ice and snow, and the shifting cloud. The air makes you feel as if you'd had a bottle of champagne. And yet somehow, it all makes you feel awfully religious too. It's all so big, and solemn, and strong, you know.'

Lancelot held out his hand for another roll. Mary gave him one. He didn't know when he had tasted such delicious rolls. He didn't know when he had been in such excellent spirits. A tea-party under the dappled shade of a mulberry-tree was an invention little short of celestial. Lancelot beamed.

'I believe I should be a wonderfully good fellow if I could do a big mountain about once a month,' he remarked between the mouthfuls.

'I think you are a wonderfully good fellow as it is, Lance,' Miss Crookenden said, very gently.

Lancelot's hand, roll and all, stopped half-way to his mouth. 'Polly,' he began, with a sort of quiet desperation. But Miss Crookenden was absorbed in the fly again.

'There, he's cleaned his wings,' she said—'has quite unglued them. He's wiping his face with his fore-legs in the most fascinating way now. He can turn his head right round, Lance, as if it was on a pivot, and look down his own back. Don't you wish you could look down your own back?'

Miss Crookenden glanced at the young man without raising her head. Her expression was as gentle as her voice had been a minute ago, when she told him he was a wonderfully good fellow. She smiled at him. Her smile was full of kindness, of very sincere affection. All the same it was a smile preaching restraint rather than encouragement.

'Dear old boy, have some more tea?' she said; 'and go on telling me about your mountains. I like to hear about your mountains—though I am always rather nervous about you. You are careful, Lance? You're not rash?'

'Oh, no! I'm not rash.'—Lancelot held his head high for a minute. He wanted to get the better of a certain

shaking of the solid ground of his innermost self—so to speak. Then he drank his third cup of tea. A good general does not despise details. The minor means, after all, generally make or mar success. Lancelot's supreme desire was not to annoy his cousin. He would understand and obey her, even if it were to his own hindrance. It is seldom, I fancy, that any human being thus really and practically loves nother better than himself.

'Look here, Polly,' he said, presently: 'I've just remembered I got something for you as we were going up yesterday morning. It was growing in a little corner of black rock, above a big snow field, just at the beginning of the *arête*. It was rather a nasty place, with a sort of absence of things in general on both sides of you, which made you rather wonder, just at first, why on earth you'd ever been such a fool as to come. It seemed rather queer to find a flower so far up. Nice and brave of the little chap to grow there all alone, and do his level best to make things cheerful; don't you think so?'

Lancelot opened his silver cigar-case, and took out of it a tiny plant of *soldanella alpina*, with fringed purple flower-bells and round green leaves.

'Ah! what a little darling!' cried Miss Crookenden. She stooped down and looked at it closely as it lay in his open hand. The blonde head and the black one were very near together just then. The girl's pale cheek almost touched the young man's sunburnt one—or would have

touched it had not Lancelot drawn back quickly. The western sun streamed in under the spreading branches of the mulberry-tree, and lit up Mary's hair as she leant forward, turning it into a maze of dusky gold.

'Do you like it?'

'Of course I like it. But what became of the beloved cigars?'

'I don't remember. I suppose I threw them away, or Caillet had them. There—take your flower, Polly. I'm so glad you think it pretty. But I wish there had been something better to bring you. I wish I was a clever fellow, and then I could put all I saw into words, and please you that way, but——'

'Dear Lance, you couldn't please me more than you do,' Miss Crookenden said, rather hurriedly.

She looked up, smiling.

'*Voilà Satan qui entre dans le paradis*!' the emotional French lady murmured just then. From her station on the rustic bench she had watched the progress of the little tea-party with the deepest interest. As she spoke the poodle curled up his lips, showing all his white teeth in a vicious flash. The voices of the English girls came plaintively from the tennis-court, accompanied by the dull smack, smack of the racquets against the flannel-covered balls.—'Two, love—three, love—fault! No, it wasn't! Yes, it was out of court! Three, love—fault!' they cried.

And Mary Crookenden looked up smiling—looked up to

see Colthurst's dark figure coming quickly towards her, past the tennis-court, past the Frenchwoman and the grinning poodle, past a bed of rather starved crimson begonias, his shadow lying like a long ink-blot on the sun-scorched grass before him as he moved.

Miss Crookenden ceased to smile. She drew herself up haughtily. Lancelot, remarking the change in her, turned his head.

'Great Scott!' he said, under his breath, and his fingers closed hard on the plant of soldanella, sadly bruising its fairy bells.

He rose to his feet, pushing aside his chair, and waited, towering above the tea-table, largely, if silently, on the defensive. Mary was behind the table, on the side away from Colthurst. He was glad of that. He could see she was extremely annoyed. He was glad of that too.

She looked very straight at the new-comer, as if demanding an explanation of his presence. It would have been difficult to offer a more discouraging reception than was offered by these two charming young people just then. Colthurst perceived that clearly, yet he came on into the dappled shade of the mulberry-tree.

'I m-must apologise for intruding upon you, Miss Crookenden,' he said, 'b-but I have some p-property of yours to restore to you.'

'Indeed!' the young lady answered, icily.

Colthurst had an excess of stammering. He had been

thrown off his balance by the sight of Lancelot. That was wholly, disagreeably, unexpected. After the episode of the morning he had reckoned on finding the young lady in more amenable company. It was only by sheer force of will that he could master that wretched stutter sufficiently to go on speaking at all. He was at a horrible disadvantage. And these two charming young people, who had so lately been deeply concerned in the fate of a fly, did nothing to help him. They were merciless—from their own point of view were not only justified, but absolutely right in being merciless. The minor paradoxes life presents are really cruel. In face of them shall one laugh or cry? I don't know. Any how, Colthurst did go on speaking.

'I found this when you left the exhibition, that night,' he said, drawing out the holland-covered sketch-book. 'It must have fallen out of the p-pocket of your cloak. I did my b-best to return it to you before leaving London. I called at your house, but I was told you had gone abroad. I b-brought it with me, because I thought it just p-possible I might have an opportunity of giving it to you.'

Mary was really pleased at the recovery of her sketch-book. Unconsciously she softened slightly. She rose, and extended her hand to take it. But Lancelot intervened. He put her hand gently aside, and took the book from Colthurst himself. He tried honestly not to be un-

necessarily disagreeable, but his manner was offensive from the very carefulness of its civility, as he said—'I'm sure my cousin's extremely obliged to you. I'm sure we are very much indebted to you for giving yourself so much trouble. Thanks.'

A kind of spasm of rage passed across Colthurst's face; but he had come here for quite other purposes than making a scene with this thick-skulled, thick-witted, young barbarian. He had sufficient self-control not even to look at Lancelot. His only safety, under the circumstances, lay in ignoring him altogether. So he addressed himself to Miss Crookenden again, a strange touch of humility, of pleading, like that of some dumb creature asking sympathy and toleration, in his expression.

'I was d-determined to give it back to you myself, because I wanted to speak to you about your drawings. You must allow me to tell you they are very able—remarkable even. I have a good deal of experience in this matter. I know what I am saying. I have a right to express an opinion.'

Colthurst put two fingers inside his collar and wrenched it outward.

'I am not indulging in any banal attempt at flattery,' he went on. 'Art is altogether too serious to me for me to use it as an excuse for p-pretty speeches to you or any one else. I detest the whole race of dilettante amateurs who play with it, and try to make capital in society

out of an imaginary taste for it. Most amateurs' drawing and painting is a mere expression of personal vanity, a bid for applause from persons as ignorant and trivial-minded as themselves. They are an unmitigated nuisance. They, and their paltry caricatures of nature, bring art into contempt.'—The words were beginning to come. Colthurst was warming to his work. He was beginning to make himself felt—to dominate the situation. Miss Crookenden was attentive. Her eyes were growing responsive, dilating, deepening in colour.—'But with you it is different. You have got the root of the matter in you. You have a true gift. You ought to study. If you don't know this already, you ought to know it, and therefore I have come here to tell it you. You must study. It will be culpable of you if you neglect to study, possessing, as you do, a distinct gift.'

He spoke in a tone of authority. Miss Crookenden was not, as a rule, particularly amenable to authority, yet she listened. Lancelot listened also. He was profoundly annoyed.

'Upon my word, Mr. Colthurst,' he broke in, 'you seem to me to be taking——'

But Mary stopped him, laying her hand for a moment on his arm.—'Be quiet, dear old boy,' she said, gravely. 'It is kind of Mr. Colthurst to tell me this. You don't quite understand.'

'You are quite right; I don't,' he answered, turning half away.

For once Lancelot ceased to be submissive to his cousin and his love. He was displeased.

Colthurst watched her, meanwhile, in his quick, restless oddly violent way.

'D-don't wrap your talent up in a napkin, Miss Crookenden,' he said, stammering again. 'It is horribly d-dangerous to do that. The talents we have and refuse to use, mortify, putrefy, taint all our lives with a hateful death-scent of failure and regret.'

Mary Crookenden was very beautiful just then. Her lips smiled, her eyes positively blazed. But her beauty was a trifle hard, perhaps. The strength of the woman's nature, not its sweetness, was evident.

'You believe I might really do something worth doing —that I might make a mark, in fact,' she said.

She looked full at James Colthurst, and he looked back steadily, daringly, intently, for a perceptible space of time. The girl's face kept its pure waxen whiteness. It was the man who flushed.

'Yes,' he said, 'I believe you may make a mark. I am almost prepared to say you may be famous—if you like.'

Then he bowed to her, still ignoring Lancelot, and passed from the shade of the spreading mulberry-tree, away across the sun-scorched grass again.

'*Et voilà Satan, qui s'en va!*' murmured the Frenchwoman. '*Chut! Scipio, chut!*'—this to the poodle, who

curled up his lips and showed his teeth.—'*Je me demande si la belle Anglaise vient de mordre dans le fruit défendu, et si elle en donnera à son amour de gladiateur? Mon Dieu, c'est amusant, comme le diable se mêle de tout!*'

'Fifteen, love—game!' cried the girls from the tennis-ground. One of those who had lost threw down her racquet petulantly.—'It's no use playing when she's out here,' she said. 'She is so very smart and superior. She always makes me lose. I wonder who that new man is who's been talking to her! He's the third to-day.'

Between the cousins there was a long silence. Mary sat down again. She was very quiet, looking up absently at the branches and glossy leaves overhead, still smiling a little, still with a great light in her eyes. All the latent ambition had been stirred into activity within her. The possibilities of life had grown august, imposing. She had always been impatient of restrictions, of mediocrity. She had always wished, and tried, too, in a hundred little ways, to differentiate herself from the ordinary run of social young womanhood. She had struggled to rise from the ranks. And now, so it seemed to her, she had been presented not only with a commission, but with a field-marshal's baton. The assurance that she had the capacity of emerging, that she 'could an' if she would,' was superb to Mary Crookenden. It filled her heart to overflowing with proud gladness. 'I am almost prepared to say you may be famous—if you like'—the words rang through her

like a trumpet-call. They dazzled her imagination, dazzled, too, her self-love. To her they were fraught with tremendous issues. Are such magnificent hopes and sensations, indeed, among the results of tasting the forbidden fruit?

'Where did you say Aldham had put up?' Lancelot inquired, abruptly.

The question, and the tone in which the young man asked it, jarred upon Miss Crookenden.

'I am not aware that I made any statement as to Mr. Aldham's place of "putting up,"' she replied. 'I believe he has got rooms at the Hôtel des Comtes de Savoie. It is in the market-place. Are you going to see him?'

'Yes; if you don't want me for anything, I think I shall go and see him.'

Lancelot spoke in a curiously quiet, dogged manner.

'Shall you dine with him?'

'Yes; if you don't want me for anything, I shall stay and dine with him.'

'Oh, very well,' said Miss Crookenden. 'I dare say that will be the best arrangement. I shall be free to spend the evening with Sara Jacobini, then. We may as well go. Please give me my sketch-book.'

But Lancelot did not immediately accede to her request. He stood fidgeting with the tea-things in a way which Miss Crookenden found remarkably purposeless and provoking—pushing his cup and saucer back from the edge

of the table till they ran into and nearly overset the honey-pot, which in its turn bore down upon the unhappy fly, just nicely recovered from his semi-drowning, and able to apply his mind to the interests of fly-life in a comfortable spirit again, and caught him by three legs under the bottom rim of it. The fly showed fight, kicking out his remaining legs, beating the air with ineffectual wings. But Fate, in the shape of the glass honey-pot, was heavy-handed. She held him fast.

'Upon my word, Polly,' Lancelot said, slowly, unconscious of the struggling fly, though gazing at the honey-pot, 'I don't at all fancy your having back this book.'

'Why not?' demanded Miss Crookenden.

'Well, it's been in that fellow's pocket or portmanteau for the best part of a month. And—well—I'd rather you had nothing more to do with it.'

'Lancelot!' she cried. And for once, whether from anger or from some more subtle feeling, Mary Crookenden blushed.

The young man pushed the cup and saucer and honey-pot a little farther. The fly reeled off with a frantic buzz, minus a couple of legs.—'You told me not to interfere. I promised I wouldn't. But it's no good. I don't like your getting mixed up with that man and people of his sort. I know I can't prevent your knowing whom you choose——'

'No, you can't. I am glad you recognise that fact,' Miss Crookenden said.

Lancelot continued looking helplessly into the honey-pot. He preferred his long-ago boyish complaint against his cousin.

'You see you really are awfully changeable. One never knows where to have you. You said yourself that fellow Colthurst was insufferable when we saw him that night with Carr—you remember. He seemed to me just as insufferable just now, rather more so, in fact. But you let him spout away as much as he pleased. I can't make it all out. I'd do anything in the world to please you, Polly—you know that—but I can't pretend to like, to approve—don't you know—when I don't.'

'Have we arrived at the end of the recitals of my misdeeds?' Mary asked, loftily. 'I hope so. Pray let us end this perfectly useless discussion. Go and dine with Mr. Aldham. I trust his conversation may have a soothing effect upon you, and that you may be little less aware of my errors and a little less didactic when we meet to-morrow. Good-bye, Lancelot.'

As she finished speaking, Mary stooped down to pick up her parasol, which lay at the foot of the mulberry-tree. She was very much ruffled, and consequently, I suppose, did not pay much heed to her movements. For in stooping she struck her forehead sharply against the projecting stump of a sawn-off branch. Such absurd, childish little

accidents are fatal to airs and graces, to superiority and grandeur. The blow made her cry out involuntarily and brought tears into her eyes.

At the sound of that cry Lancelot's heart melted within him.—'Polly, Polly,' he said, 'oh! you're not hurt?'

He made her sit down again, picked up her parasol—muttering something about that 'blasted stump'—stood over her altogether gentle, solicitous, distressed.

'Dear Lance, why will you be odious and quarrel with me?' Mary asked, turning the tables upon the unlucky youth with truly feminine unscrupulousness and despatch.

'I don't want to quarrel with you, if you're not hurt,' he answered, inconsequently. 'Tell me, Polly, are you sure you're not hurt?'

'Oh, no, not at all—not much; at least, it was only a knock.'—Miss Crookenden rubbed her eyes. She knew that was undignified. But she was sitting upon her pocket, the small square of embroidered cambric was inaccessible, and the tears did tickle so!—'It will be all right directly,' she went on. 'I'll get Chloe to put some *eau-de-Cologne* on it. Lance, are you all nice and good again? You're not cross? We were having such a dear little time.'

'I know that,' said poor Lancelot.—He drew himself up, opening his fine chest, taking a deep breath. He wondered, in passing, if the girl the least measured what she caused him to endure when she made tender, intimate

little speeches like that? Of course she didn't.—'Here, give me your rattle-traps,' he said, 'and let's go after Chloe and the *eau-de-Cologne*. You mustn't wait, or the bruise may come out.'

Lancelot carried his cousin's parasol and hat and gloves in-doors, and delivered them over to the old coloured woman in the wide corridor up-stairs. He lingered, just a minute, before betaking himself to number twenty-two, to put on more civilized garments. Perhaps Mary might suggest some modification of plan for the evening. But she neither suggested fresh plans nor did she ask again for her sketch-book. As Lancelot washed and brushed and smartened himself up, he tried to derive satisfaction from the latter fact. This is a world, he reflected, in which you must learn to set one thing against another.

As to the tiny plant of *soldanella alpina* and its fringed fairy bells, the waiter swept it into the slop-basin, along with the maimed fly, and the crumbs, and the cup-rinsings, when he came to clear away the tea-things. Beauty, too often, wanders into very queer company when once it begins to wander from home.

END OF VOL. I.

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